Lone Wolf and Cub (*Kozure Okami* in Japan) is acknowledged worldwide for the brilliant writing of series creator Kazuo Koike and the groundbreaking cinematic visuals of the late Goseki Kojima. Creating unforgettable imagery of stark beauty, kinetic fury, and visceral thematic power, the epic samurai adventure has influenced a generation of visual storytellers both in Japan and in the West.

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— Matt Brady

Comics Newsarama

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KAZUO KOIKE & GOSEKI KOJIMA

LONE WOLF AND CUB

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VOLUME 3

THE FLUTE OF THE FALLEN TIGER

By KAZUO KOIKE & GOSEKI KOJIMA

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lettering & retouch
DIGITAL CHAMELEON

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THE FLUTE OF THE FALLEN TIGER

子連れ狼

By KAZUO KOIKE
& GOSEKI KOJIMA

VOLUME

3

A NOTE TO READERS

Lone Wolf and Cub is famous for its carefully researched re-creation of Edo-Period Japan. To preserve the flavor of the work, we have chosen to retain many Edo-Period terms that have no direct equivalents in English. Japanese is written in a mix of Chinese ideograms and a syllabic writing system, resulting in numerous synonyms. In the glossary, you may encounter words with multiple meanings. These are words written with Chinese ideograms that are pronounced the same but carry different meanings. A Japanese reader seeing the different ideograms would know instantly which meaning it is, but these synonyms can cause confusion when Japanese is spelled out in our alphabet. *O-yurushi o* (please forgive us)!

LONE WOLF AND CUB

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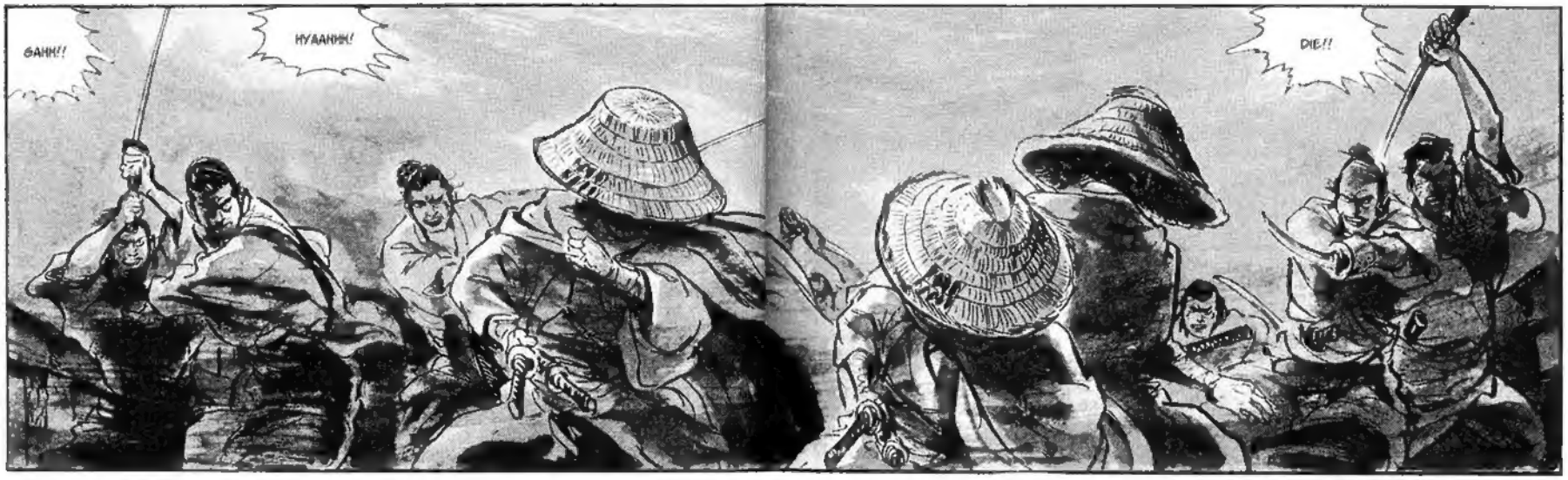
The Ronin Report. 317

the fifteenth

Flute of the Fallen Tiger

鳴門

DEATH LUST...
INDEED.
CHEAP THUGS, WORKING FOR MONEY.


GAHH!!
HYAAHH!
DIE!!

SHUKK
UGYAHH!
SKASSH
FNKK
FWSSH
SKUSHH
THUKK
SHSSH
FSSH

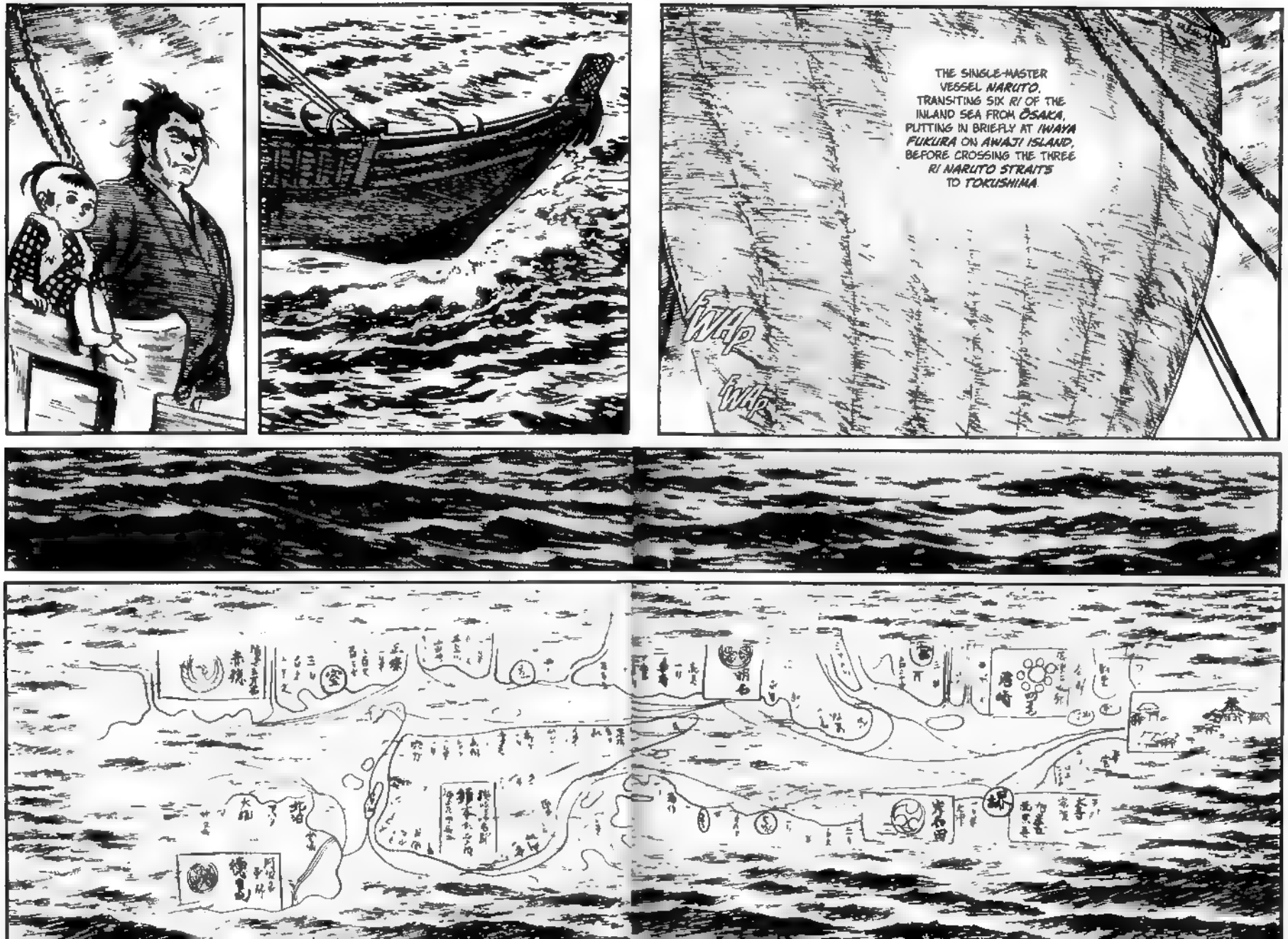
SKASSH
GEWAHH!
GEHHH!
GUEHH!

KURUMA! BLOOD SPATTER, AGAINST FOES LIKE THESE? PRACTICE HARDER!

YOU, TOO?!
NO BLOOD LUST
BUT HE'S GOOD..
PAPA!
HE HAS A CHILD. HE'S NOT WITH THEM.
HM..

OH GOD, OH GOD...!
AIIEE! AIIIE!!
AH WA WA WAH!
IT HAPPENED AS YOU SAW-WE KILLED IN SELF-DEFENSE WE WILL REPORT THIS INCIDENT TO THE MARITIME WARDENS OF MINESUGA HAN. HAVE NO FEAR.
CHING
PLEASE REMOVE THE BODIES.

BEAR CLAW AND IRON CLUB...
REVERSE-HAND DRAW...
THEY'RE GOOD...
WHSSHH
FWHSSHH
SSHHH


THE SINGLE-MASTER VESSEL NARUTO, TRANSITING SIX RI OF THE INLAND SEA FROM ŌSAKA, PUTTING IN BRIEFLY AT IWAYA FUKURA ON AWAJI ISLAND, BEFORE CROSSING THE THREE RI NARUTO STRAITS TO TOKUSHIMA.

LORD HAVE MERCY
HOW CAN THEY SIT THERE SO CALM AFTER BUTCHERING THOSE PEOPLE?
I-I WANT OFF THIS HORRIBLE SHIP!
THEY START FIGHTING?
WHO THE HELL ARE THEY?
I . I GOT AN IDEA WHO THOSE GUYS ARE.
THE BENTENRA! BROTHERS!

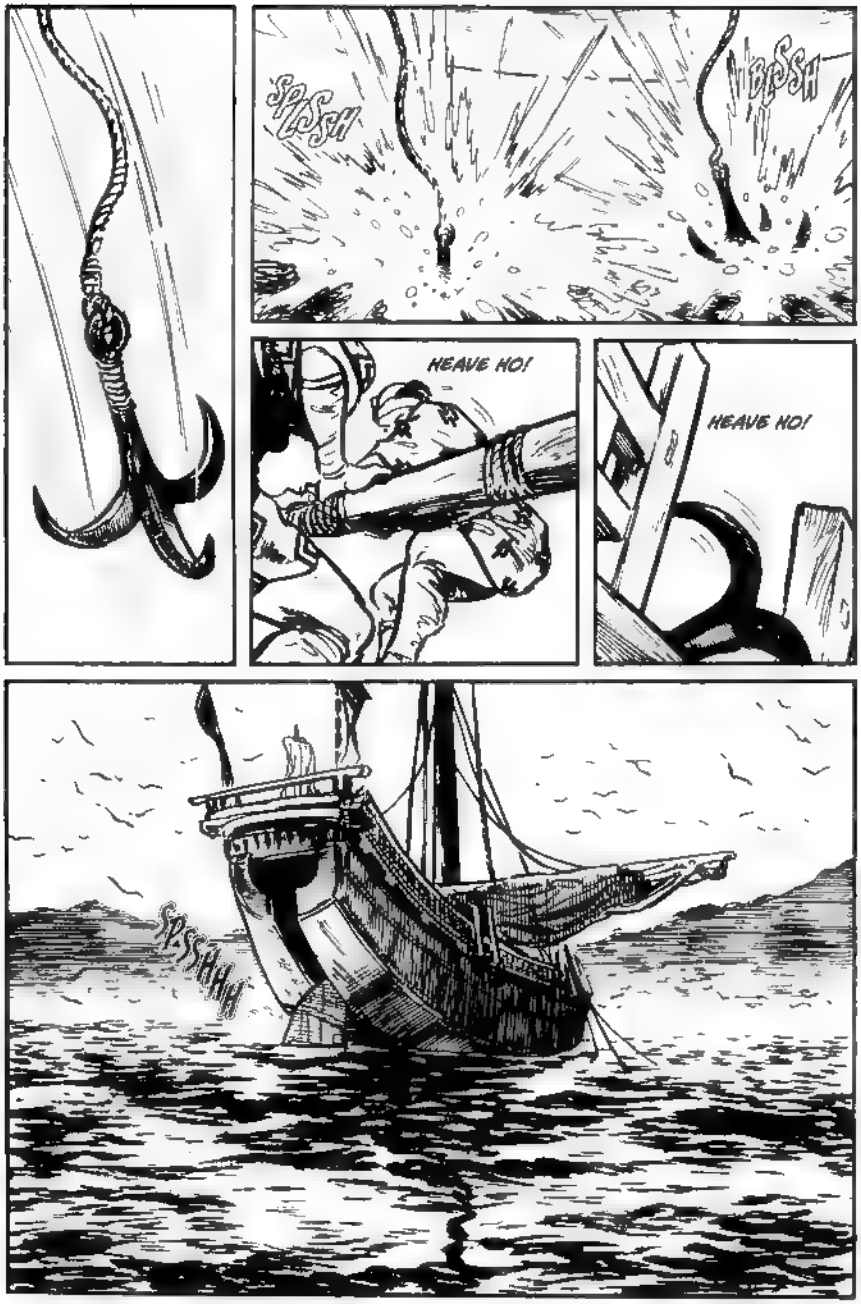
?? "BENTENRAI" .? WH-WHAT'S THAT?
IT'S THEIR NAMES, BENMA, TENMA, AND KURUMA. TAKE THE FIRST CHINESE CHARACTER OF EACH OF THEIR NAMES AND LINE 'EM UP, AND SEE, BENTENRAI!
GET IT? THE COMING OF BENTEN, GODDESS OF GOOD FORTUNE!
YOU MAY NOT KNOW THEM DOWN HERE IN OSAKA AND POINTS WEST, BUT UP IN EDO AND BEYOND. .
JUST THE NAMES ENOUGH TO STOP A KID CRYING. THAT'S HOW BAD THEY ARE.
ARE THEY .. WANTED CRIMINALS?
NAW! OTHER WAY AROUND! THE OFFICIALS COME BEGGING THEM TO WORK!
EH?!
LICENSED TO KILL, SEE, AS MUCH AS THEY WANT!
G-GOOD GOD!

AND FOR ALL THAT, EVEN YAKUZA WITH RECORDS A MILE LONG WELCOME 'EM LIKE THE COMING OF BENTEN HERSELF!
THAT DON'T WASH! I MEAN, IF THE AUTHORITIES HIRE THEM, THEN THEY'RE THE ENEMIES OF YAKUZA.!
YOU'D THINK. AND YET, THEY AIN'T!
THEN WHO ON EARTH ARE THEY?
THE THREE MIDARI BROTHERS!
WHAT BENTENRAI REALLY DOES IS..
FWWT
TONK
YEEK!

THE MOUTH IS THE SOURCE OF ALL CALAMITY
Y-YES, SIR!
SORRY TO DISTURB YOU. WOULD YOU RETURN OUR KNIFE?

SHAK
THANKS.
AND SO, HONORED SIR WHERE ARE YOU BOUND?
AWA NATO-GUN IN TOKUSHIMA.
WE TRAVEL TOGETHER.

THIS SHIP ANCHORS AT THE RIVER MOUTH. WE GO UPSTREAM ON A BOAT FROM MATSUDAIRA HAN.
IF IT IS CONVENIENT, ACCOMPANY US. IT'S HARD, TRAVELING WITH A CHILD.
MY THANKS. I AM ŌGAMI ITTŌ.
HIDARI BENMA. THESE ARE MY YOUNGER BROTHERS, TENMA AND KURUMA.
FORGIVE OUR EARLIER INDISCRETION.

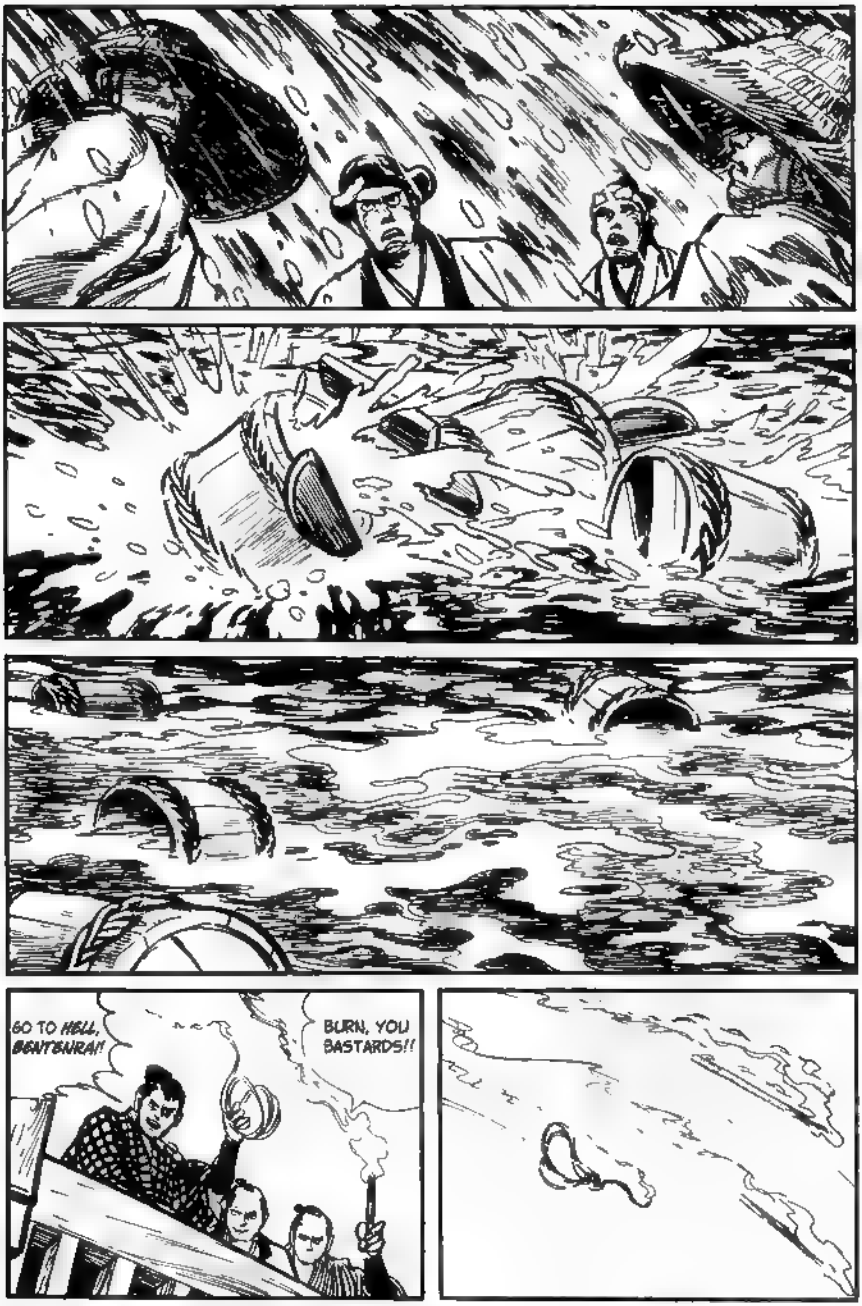

SPSSH
SPSSH
HEAVE HO!
HEAVE HO!
SP-SSHH

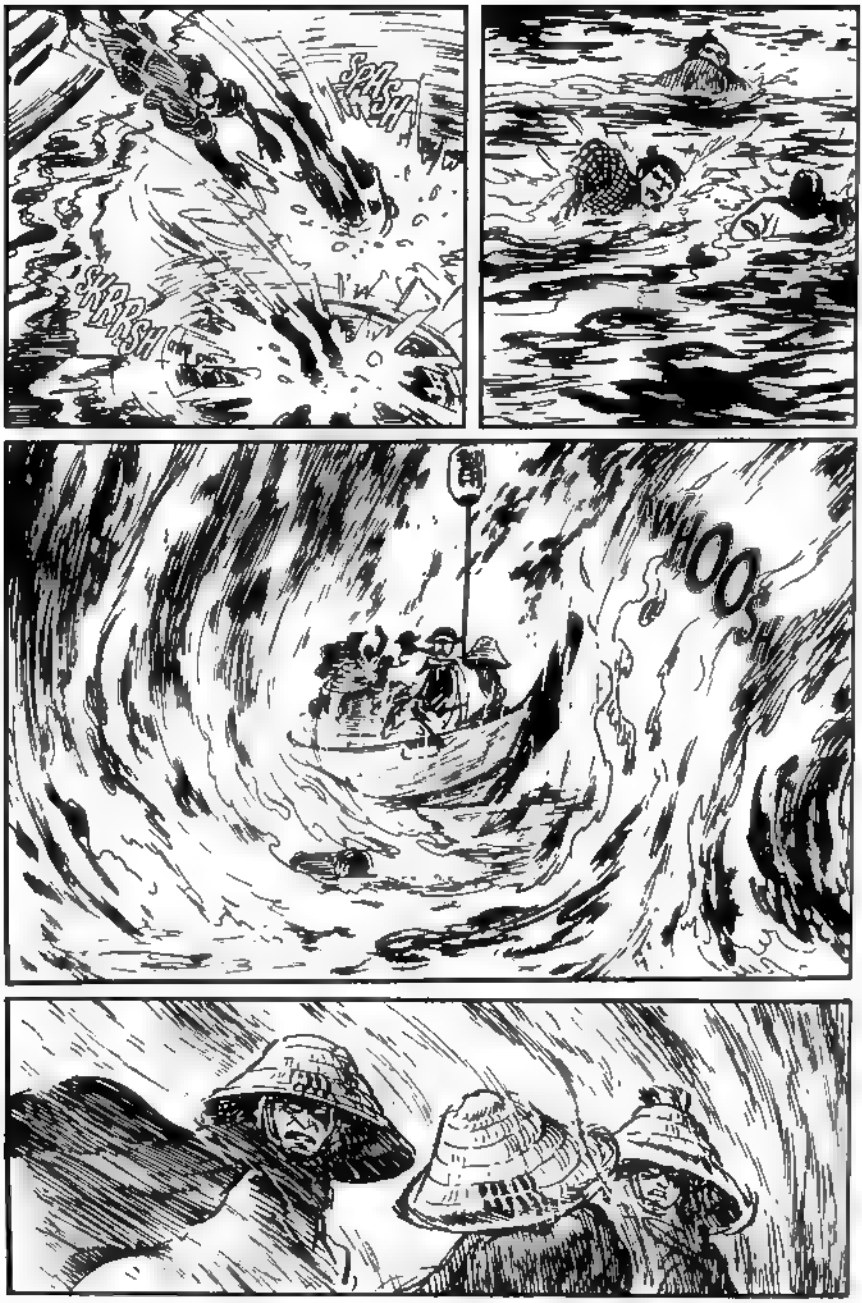
HEAVE HO!
THEY READ LIPS TO SEE WHAT THEIR OPPONENTS ARE SAYING...
THEY CAN ONLY BE...
THAT'S WHY THEY THREW THE KOGARA THROWING KNIFE AS WELL...
THEY DELIBERATELY SHOWED ME THEY COULD LIP-READ, REVEALING THEIR IDENTITY, AND STILL ASKED US TO JOIN THEM...
HEAVE HO, MY MATIES!
SPISH!
御用
*GO-YŌ (OFFICIAL BUSINESS)

HIRANO SHIRÔHEI! COAST GUARD OF MATSUDAIRA HAN!
YOU HAVE OUR THANKS.
I AM HIDARI KURUMA.
TEAMA...
AND I, BEAMA.

SKSSH
'BENTENRA!
AN HONOR PLEASE.. THE BOAT AWAITS.
COME..
....
HEH! THEY WERE DUMB ENOUGH TO ATTACK BENTENRA! FOR MONEY? SERVES 'EM RIGHT.
BUNCH OF LOSERS.
RIGHT THEN! DUMP THE BODIES!

DAMN! YOU'LL BE AVENGED, I SWEAR!
COUNT ON YOU TO SPOT THESE OIL KEGS, BOSS.
WE'LL BURN 'EM ALIVE!
EVEN BENTENRAI'S HUMAN!


GO TO HELL, BENTSURA!!
BURN, YOU BASTARDS!!

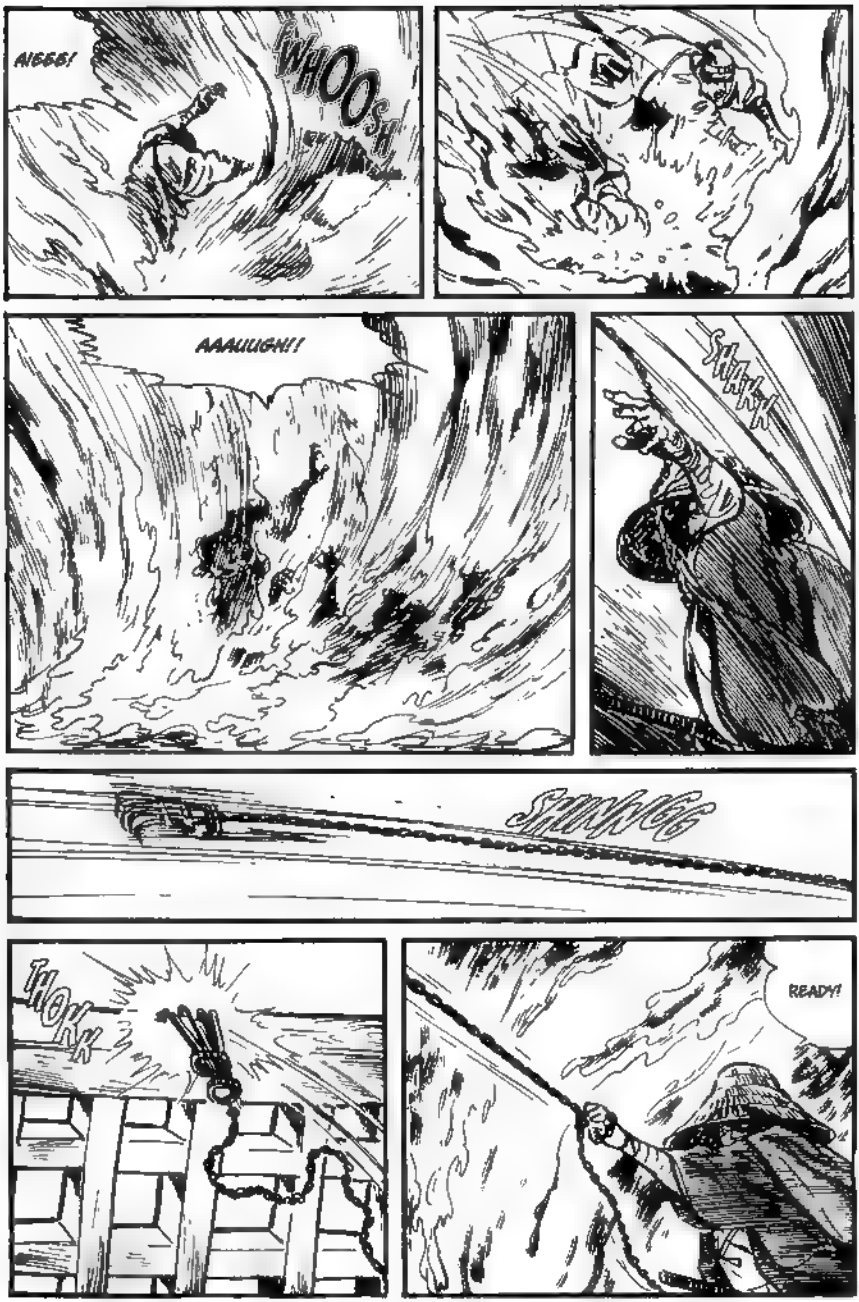

SPLASH
SWASH
WHOOSH

WHOOSH
KA-ACK!!

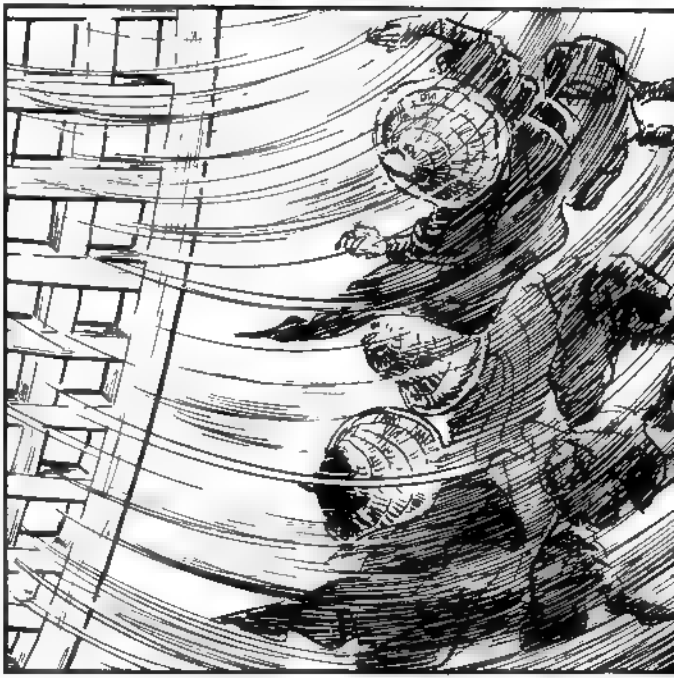
HSSH

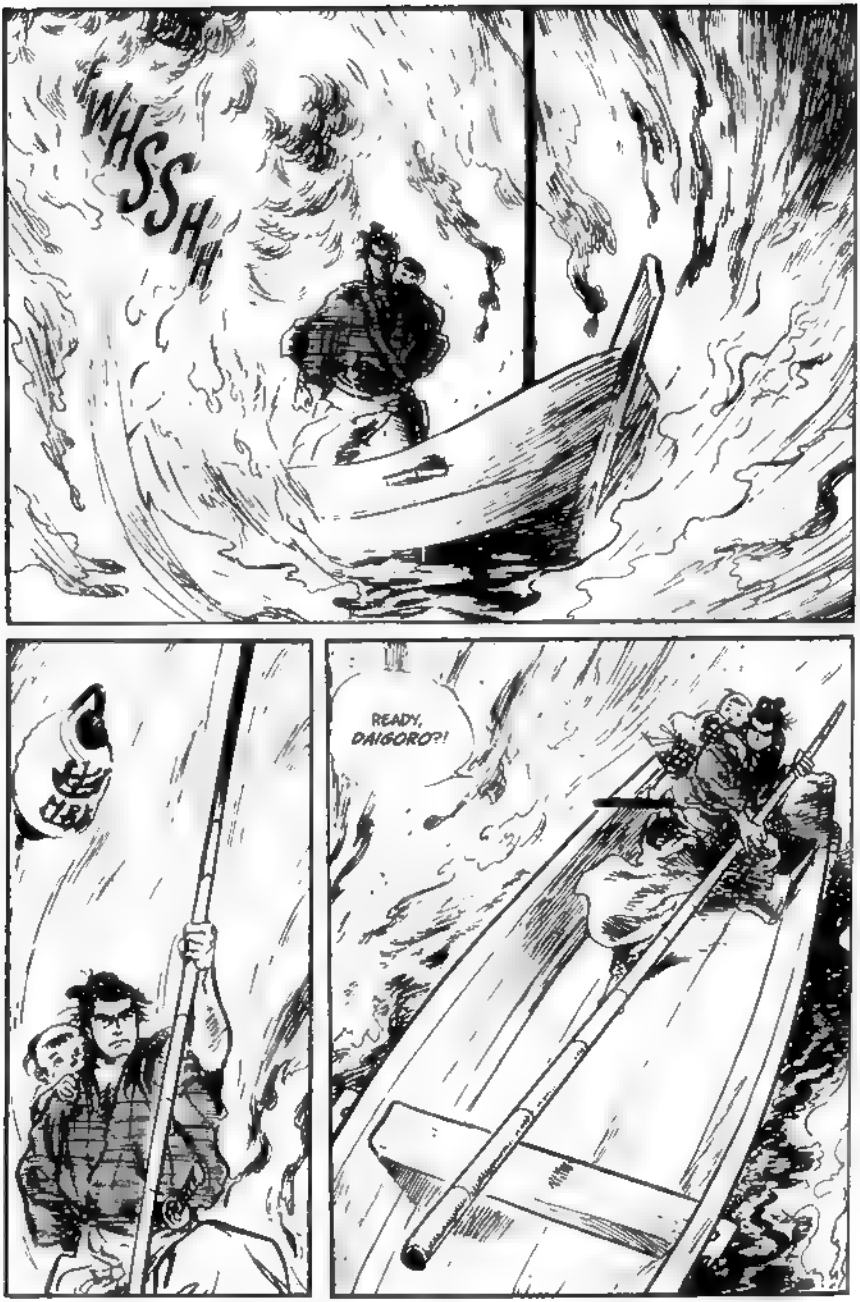
GOOD FORTUNE AND ILL, TWISTED TOGETHER LIKE A ROPE.
I INVITED YOU WITH US FOR YOUR OWN GOOD, ONLY TO BRING YOU DISASTER. FORGIVE ME.
HOW SHALL YOU ESCAPE?
I'VE HEARD THE KUROKUWA SPIES OF THE SHOGUNATE ALSO TRANSPORT PRISONERS.
YOU THREW THE KNIFE TO REVEAL YOUR NINJA TRAINING.
I WANT TO KNOW WHY YOU HAD US JOIN YOU AFTER DELIBERATELY REVEALING YOUR IDENTITY
SO— YOU DID KNOW.
WE, TOO, HAVE HEARD— OGAMI ITTŌ, THE SHOGUN'S EXECUTIONER, NOW WANDERS THE WORLD AS THE ASSASSIN LONE WOLF AND CUB.

WE ARE GUARDIANS, YOU THE ASSASSIN! EVEN IF YOU DO NOT SEEK TO KILL OUR CLIENT, DUTY DEMANDS WE MAKE CERTAIN.
THUS WE HAD YOU COME WITH US, IN A WAY THAT WOULD NOT OFFEND
AS YOU CAN SEE, WE HAVE MANY ENEMIES! THE MAN WE GUARD IS A MAJOR CRIMINAL, WHOSE TESTIMONY MAY DESTROY AN ENTIRE CLAN.
CAN YOU DENY YOU'VE BEEN HIRED TO TERMINATE HIM? I THINK NOT!
IF SO, WHY NOT KILL US?
WE CANNOT ATTACK ONE WHO DOES NOT FIGHT AND MAY BE INNOCENT. INSTEAD, WE ASKED YOU TO ACCOMPANY US. .
BUT NOW THERE IS NO NEED!!
WE NINJA HAVE NO PROBLEM ESCAPING THESE FLAMES. NOT SO SOMEONE BURDENED WITH A CHILD.
AAAAA!

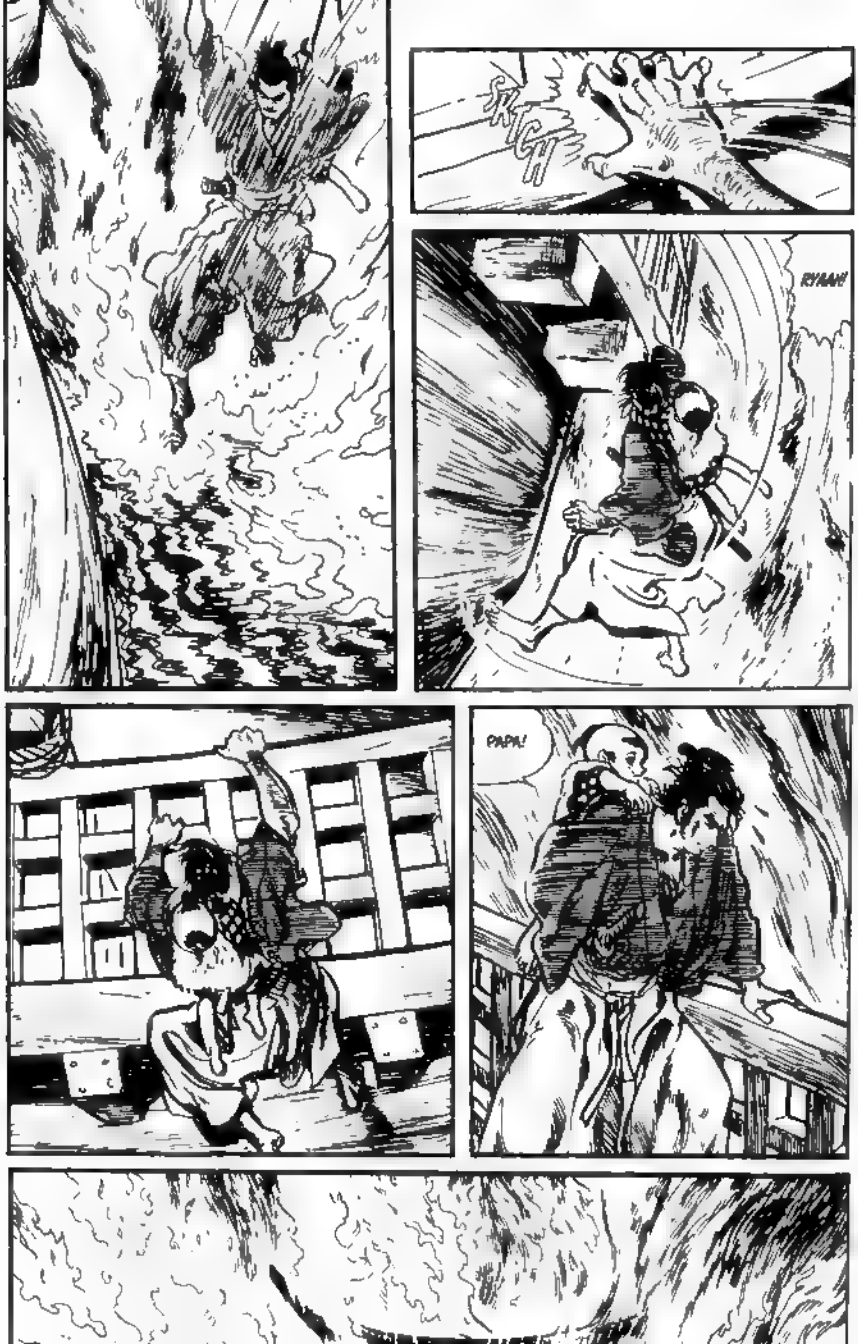

AIEEE!
WHOOSH
AAAUUGH!!
SHRRK
SWUGG
TLOK
READY!

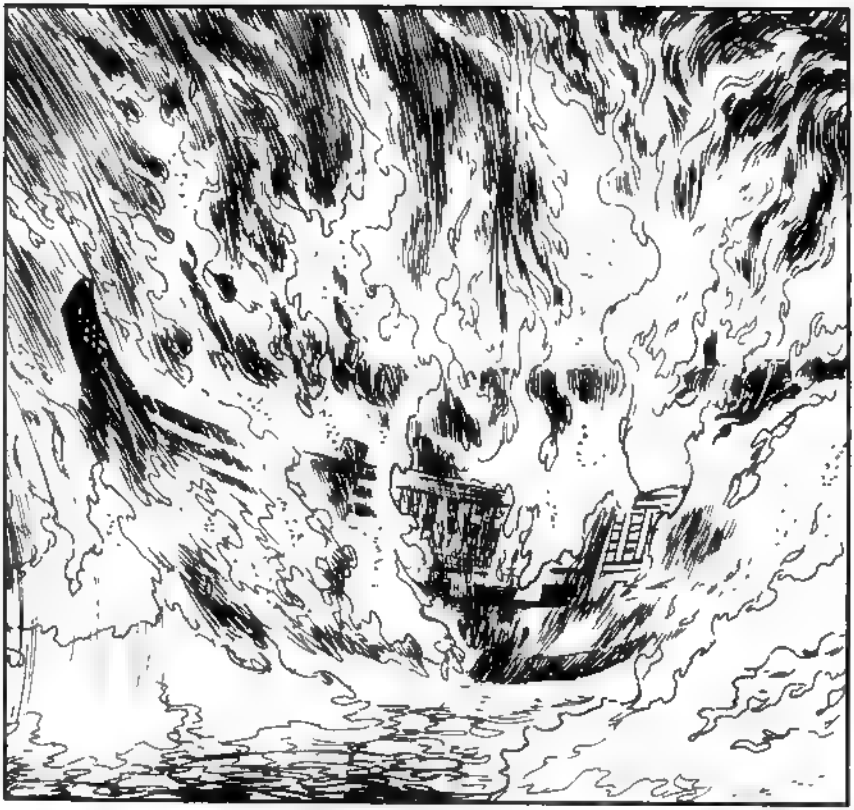
YOU DOOMED US IN YOUR OWN, YOU RUST ESCAPE IN YOUR OWN!
AHHHHH!



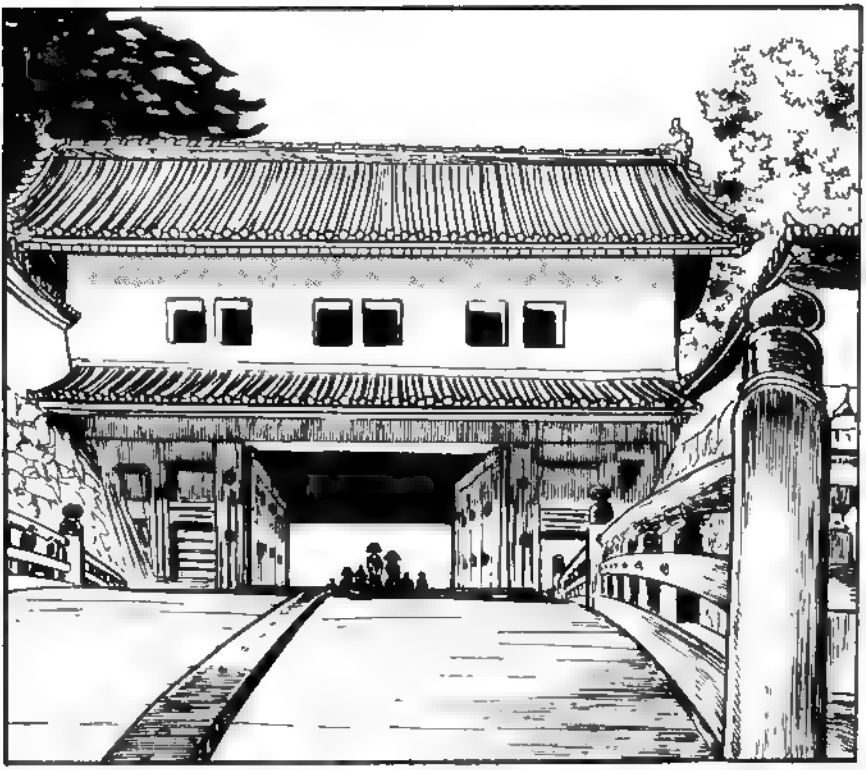

WHSSH
READY, DAIGORO?!

HYAHHH!


SKCH
RYAAH!
PAPA!

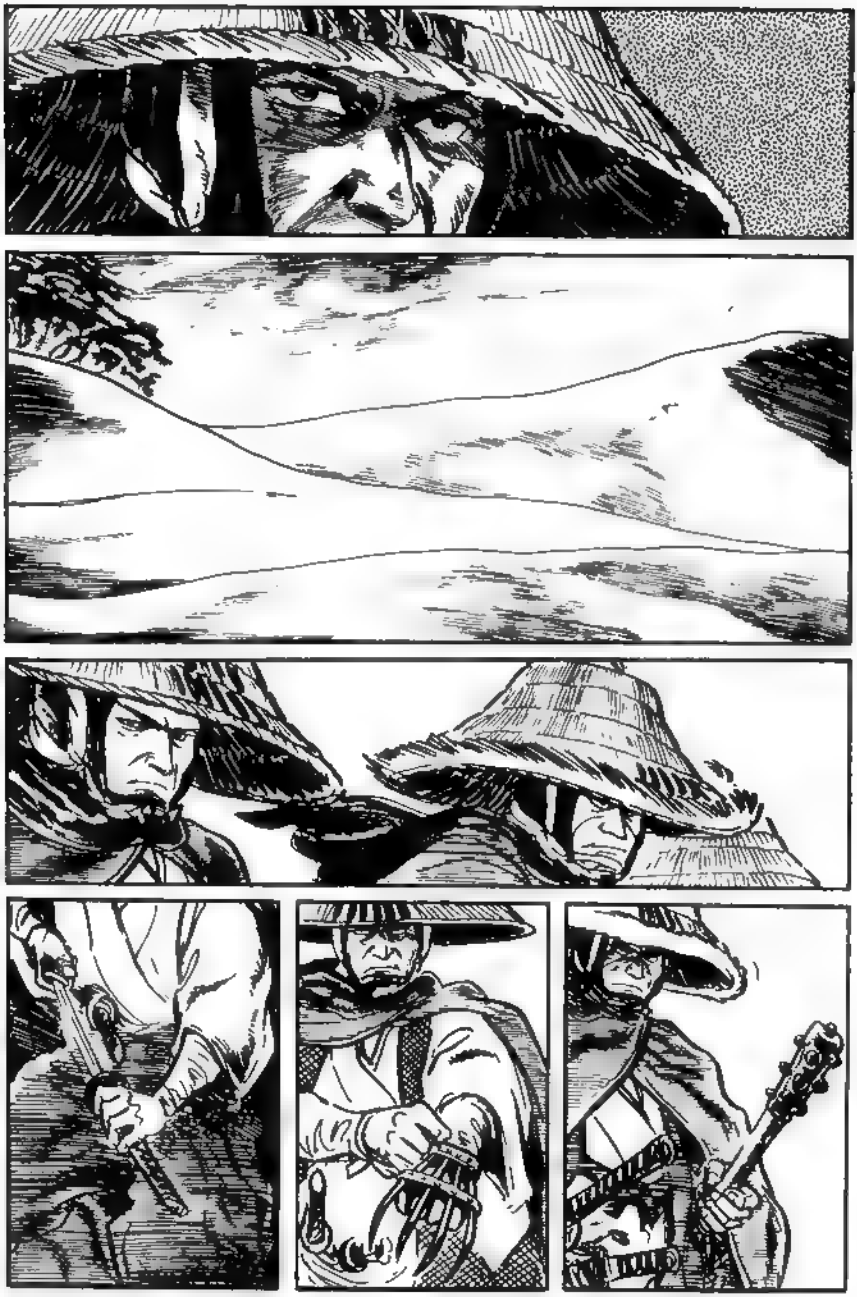


WHEN INFRACTIONS OCCURRED BETWEEN TWO *HAN*, WITH NEITHER SIDE WILLING TO CHANGE THEIR CONFLICTING STORIES, THE *SHOGUNATE* ITSELF RENDERED FINAL JUDGMENT AT AN OFFICIAL TRIAL. CO-CONSPIRATORS WOULD BE TRANSPORTED UNDER GUARD TO *EDO*, FOR INTERROGATION AND FINAL JUDGMENT BY THE JUDICIARY OFFICIALS OF THE *KANJŌ BUGYŌSHO*, THE OFFICE OF THE COMMISSIONER OF FINANCE.



THE LOSING HAN COULD FACE PERMANENT DISSOLUTION.
AND THUS MANY A CONSPIRATOR NEVER REACHED EDO, ATTACKED AND KILLED
EN ROUTE AS THE HAN WITH THE WEAKER CASE SOUGHT TO BURY THE TRUTH FOREVER.
AND SO AN ADDITIONAL TASK FELL UPON THE KUROKUWA NINJA CLAN—
THE ARMED TRANSPORT OF SENSITIVE WITNESSES.
NO WONDER THOSE FELONS MARKED FOR ASSASSINATION
CAME TO WELCOME THEIR KUROKUWA ESCORTS AS IF THEY
WERE ANGELS OF THE BODHISATVA OF MERCY, ZAIGEN TENNYO
HERSELF AND NONE MORE SO THAN THE DEADLY
HIDARI BROTHERS, GENTENRAI.

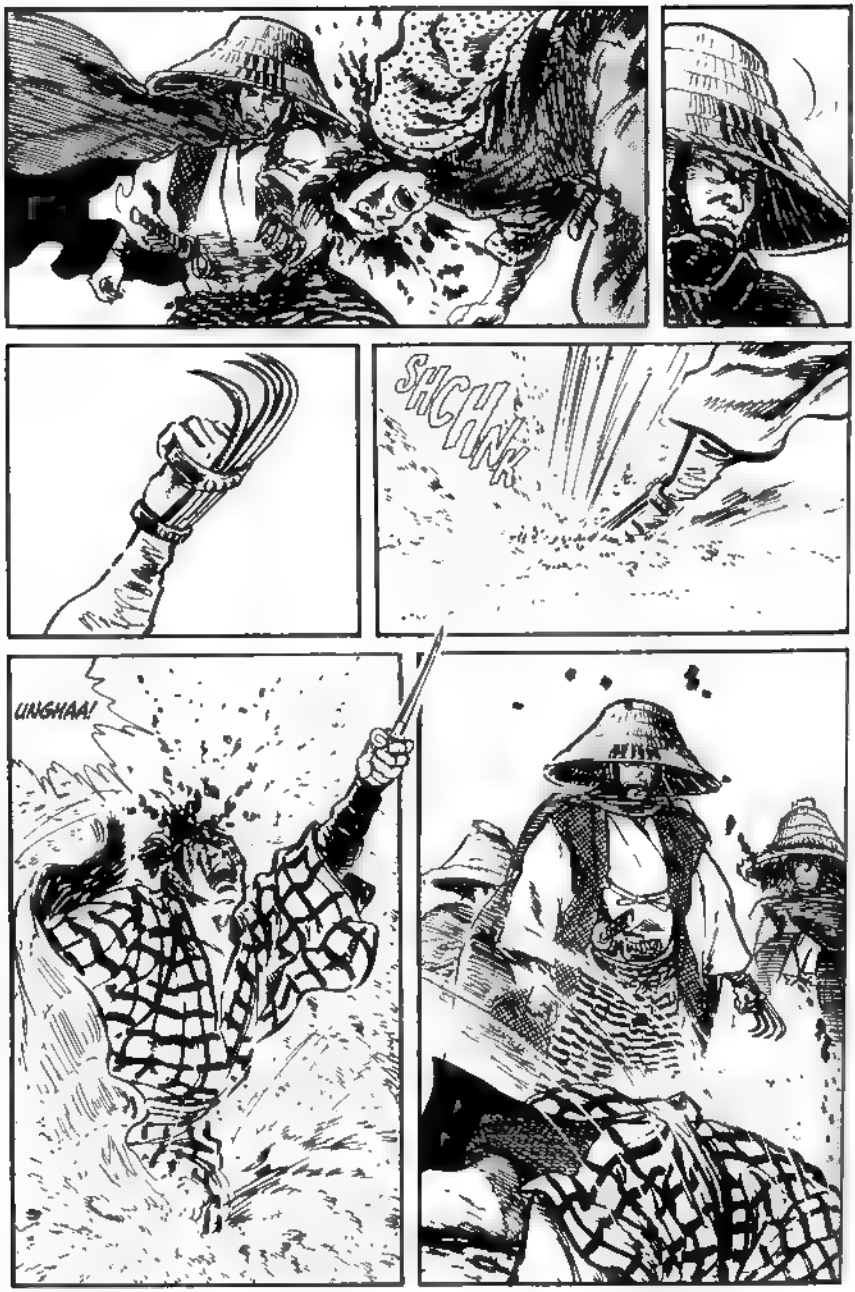
THE RETURN JOURNEY WAS TO BE BY AN OFFICIAL SHIP PROCURED FROM MATSUDAIRA HAN, MAKING PORT IN ŌSAKA, AND FINALLY, EDO.



FWIPP
SKSSH
FWIP
SKOSH

HYAHHHHH!!

SKSSH
KNUGH!
MMMMM


SHCLNK
UNGHAA!

MOVE OUT!

HRNN!

SO! IT WAS YOU BEHIND THESE SCOUNDRELS!
WRONG
HMF!
BUT AN ASSASSIN!
INDEED!
SKSSH

FSSHH
CHOK
WHISH
FWO

SWSSH
UHF
FFDD
FSSST
SKUSSH
GAHH!!
FWWP

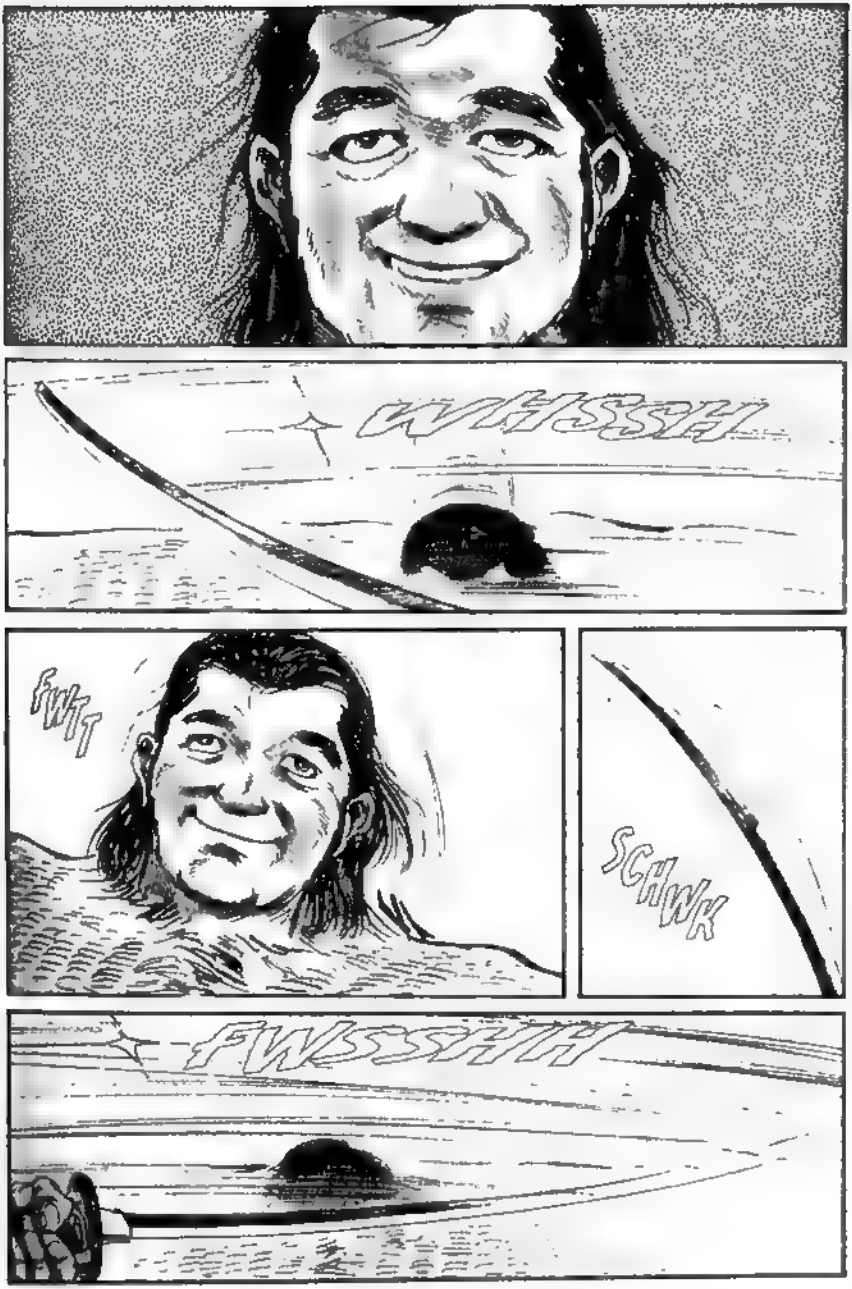
SHIRRRRR
HEYUUU

IN MY NECK. IT SOUNDS LIKE WHISTLING
FYUU
WORTHY OF THE SHOGUN'S EXECUTIONER MY BLOOD SPURTS FORTH. THE DIAGONAL CUT ACROSS MY NECK.
FYUU
KEENS LIKE THE WIND IN BARB TREES
THEY CALL IT. MOGARI-BUE. FLUTE OF THE FALLEN TIGER I ALWAYS DREAMED OF MAKING A CUT THAT WOULD SING
AND NOW I HEAR MY OWN. SUCH IRONY
FYUU

ASSASSIN! LONE WOLF AND CUB!

the sixteenth

Half Mat, One Mat, a Fistful of Rice


WHSSSH
FWT
SCHWK
FWSSSHH

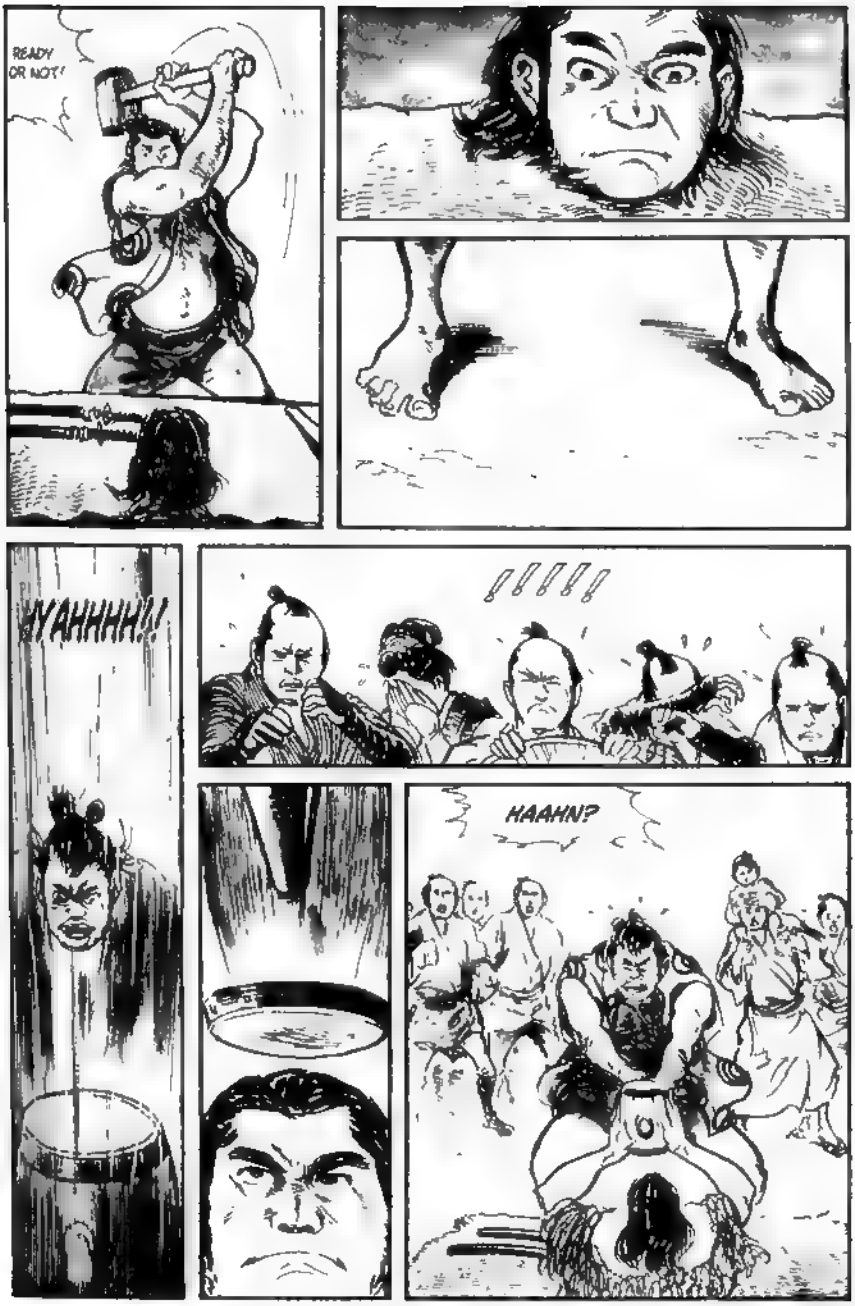
"HEAD FOR SALE/
"HEADLESS SAKON"

HRNNG...!
UWAH HA HAH! ONE STROKE TOO MANY, SIR!
FIFTY COPPERS MORE!
D-DAMNATION! ONE MORE TIME!
KCHAKK
THIS TIME WITH... THIS!
THE SPEAR? THAT'LL COST YOU, SIR-ONE HUNDRED COPPERS! WHAT WITH THE LAST ONES, THAT'S ONE HUNDRED FIFTY! PAY BEFORE YOU POKE, SIR!
ALL RIGHT!!

FFFT
HAIYAAH!!

LORDY!
NEVER SEEN NUTHIN' LIKE IT!
LAND! GET COLD SWEATS JUST WATCHING
SCARES THE WILLIES OUTTA ME!
KTKK
WAH HAH HAH! PRACTICE, GREENHORN!
HAH HAH HAH HAH!
STOP RIGHT UP! STOP RIGHT UP! NO ONE LEFT TO TAKE A WHACK?! CHOP IT, BOUNCH IT, FIFTY COPPERS! A LIVE HUMAN HEAD FOR FIFTY COPPERS!
PICK A SWORD! PICK A MALLET! ANYTHING GOES! I PRAY TO BUDDHA, YOU SWING LIKE HELL! I PROMISE I WON'T BE BACK TO HAUNT YOU!

HAH HAH HAH!
hah hah hah
hah hah hah
AW RIGHT!! NEXT IT'S ME, PAL!
WHAM
WAIT!
BWAHH HAW HAW! PISSIN' YER PANTS. HEAD MAN?!
IF YOU BREAK THE TABLE, IT'S FIFTY COPPERS IN DAMAGES!
BWAHH KAH HAH!
BEFORE THAT, YOUR HEAD'S A PANCAKE!
gyahh hah hah hah

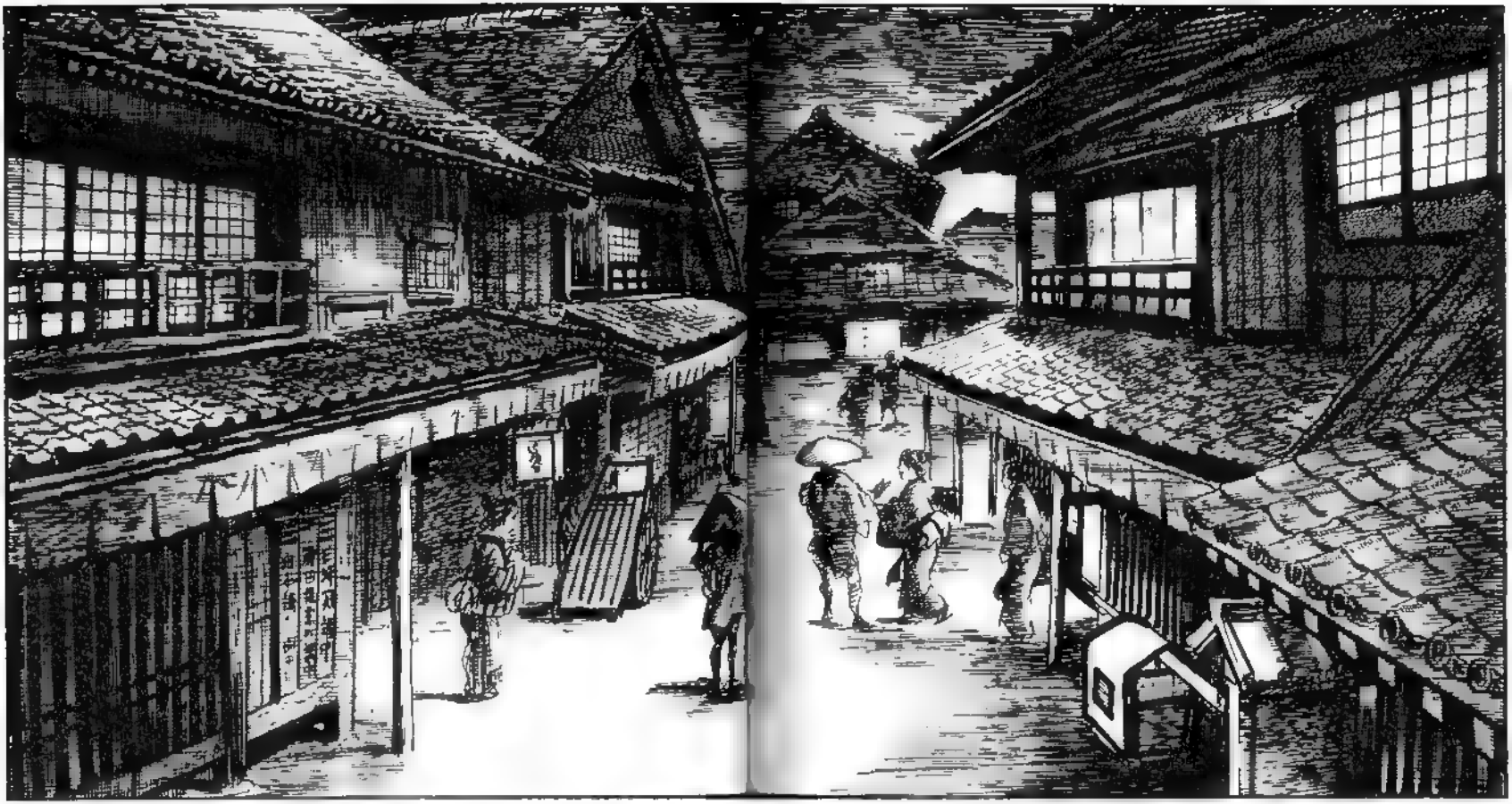

READY OR NOT!
YAHHHH!!
HAAHN?

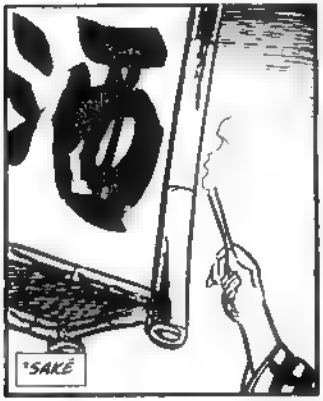
MIJIN SCHOOL SHIRAHA-DORI NAKED BLADE CAPTURE! THIS MAN'S A MASTER YET HE SELLS HIS SKILLS ON THE STREET
UNNAG' D-DAMN!!
UNNG !!
FWP
FWMM
FASSH

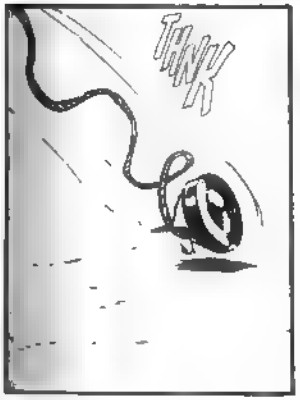
SKORK
CHNG

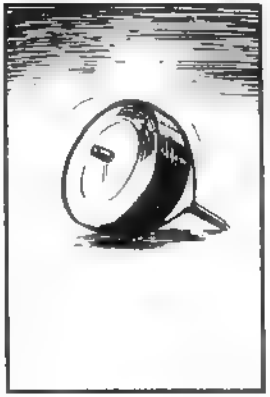
KTONK
OHH!!
MY GOD.
KSHKK
WHOA...!
I'M SO SORRY A TERRIBLE INSULT PLEASE FORGIVE ME.
...
...

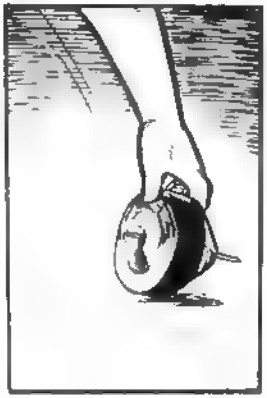
HERE—LET ME BUY YOU A DRINK TO MAKE UP FOR IT!
DON'T CONCERN YOURSELF!
NOW DON'T TALK LIKE THAT.
HOH! HERE'S A CUTE BOY! LET UNCLE SAKON BUY YOU SOMETHING NICE.
TO MAKE UP FOR THAT FRIGHT, OKAY?
THAT'S ALL, FOLKS! GONE FISHIN'! YOU RUN ALONG NOW!




SAKÉ


THNK





FLRRP
KLUNK

HEY, DARLIN'! READY YET?
YES, SIR COMING RIGHT UP!
HEH HEH! AT LAST, AT LAST!
SLURP
FIRST, TO TASTE IT!
YES HAW! PERFEC-TION!

NO INSULT IN DRINKING, SAY THE ANCIENTS! AND SO SHOULD WE, SO SHOULD WE!
WHEN THE CUP'S PASSED ROUND, THERE'S NO UPPER CLASS, NO LOWER CLASS, NO MODESTY, AND NO RUDENESS!
COME, COME ONE SIP!
I SAID NO
OH ALAS! TO SAKÉ, THE TEN VIRTUES! KING OF A HUNDRED MEDICINES! SOURCE OF LONGEVITY! AS FOOD TO A JOURNEY, AS COLD TO THE NIGHT!
PROMOTER OF HONESTY! THE JEWELED BROOM THAT SWEEPS AWAY GLOOM! BANISHER OF CLASS, MIXER OF PEOPLE, AID TO OUR LABORS, PEACE-BRINGER TO THE MULTITUDES! FRIEND OF THE SOLITARY! AH, TO TURN SUCH GLORIES DOWN!
SLRRP
SIP
I WANT TO KNOW WHY YOU DIRECTED THAT MALLET AT US WHEN YOU HAD STRENGTH TO SPARE
AH HAH!
DARLIN'! ANOTHER ROUND!
ALL THE GUYS WHO PUT DOWN MONEY WANT TO TAKE OFF MY HEAD, OF COURSE
BUT EVERY SOUL IN THE CROWD, TOO, SEE? EVERY ONE OF THEM LOCKS INTO THE BIG QUESTION—HOW CAN I KILL HIM?

ALL THAT INTENSITY, ALL HANGING ON MY NECK
BUT NOT YOU.
. . . . . .
GLPP
THAT BLOOD LUST CONCENTRATED ON MY HEAD CALL IT SAKKI, WHATEVER BUT YOU DON'T HAVE IT.
ZERO BUT INSTEAD
DEMON LUST
IT SEEMS YOU KNOW ME...
OKK

BIZEN RŌNIN, SHINO SAKON!
ŌGAMI ITTŌ!
HAH. I KNEW IT
HSSH
SHSSS

IT HAD TO BE YOU. AND SO I LET THE MALLET FLY I BEG YOUR FORGIVENESS.
THEY SAY SHINO SAKON FROM BIZEN OKAYAMA IS A MIJIN SCHOOL MASTER, A SWORDSMAN WITHOUT PEER IN THE FOUR CORNERS OF THE LAND SO WHY-
WHY DID I BECOME A BEGGAR RŌNIN, SELLING MY SAMURAI ARTS OF WAR, THAT OH SO HOLY BUGI, TO THE MASSES?
IS THAT ON THE TIP OF YOUR TONGUE?
SHLRRP
WHAT DO YOU SUPPOSE BUGI IS, REALLY?
YOU CAN COME UP WITH JUSTIFICATIONS, SURE. BUT IT'S JUST A WAY TO KILL

I LOOKED LONG AND HARD FOR ANOTHER USE FOR IT, BUT IT WAS NO GOOD.
SAMURAI AND PEASANT, WE'RE ALL PEOPLE. WE EAT THE SAME RICE, DUMP THE SAME SHIT BUT THE SAMURAI GETS SEISATSU YODATSU, THE RIGHT TO BUTCHER THE PEASANT
AND WELL, SOMEHOW BEING SAMURAI GOT TO FEELING PRETTY POINTLESS AND SO I FOUND THE ONLY OTHER WAY I COULD USE MY ART
AND HERE I AM. GETTING BY
SCRRP
SAPP
I'D HEARD FROM ONE OF THE YAGYŪ'S MEN THAT LORD ŌGAMI, THE SHOGUN'S OWN EXECUTIONER, HAD BECOME AN ASSASSIN CALLED LONE WOLF AND CUB. IF YOU'VE TAKEN THE ASSASSIN'S WAY, YOU COULD SAY I'VE CHOSEN THE WAY OF THE HUMAN BEGGAR

I DOUBT YOU ASKED ME TO DRINK WITH YOU JUST FOR THIS..
SURE ENOUGH. THE INSTANT MY EYES LIT ON THE DEMON GOD OF DEATH HIMSELF, MY HEART OPENED UP! THERE *IS* ANOTHER USE FOR MY SKILLS, BY GOD. !
BY KILLING THE *ONE*, YOU CAN SAVE THE *MANY* THAT, TOO, IS A WAY TO USE MY *ART*
WHAT?!

KINKNK
WHAT'S WRONG, SON?

YOU DON'T KNOW HOW TO SPIN A TOP?
UHH.
LEMME SEE.
IT GOES LIKE THIS, SEE?
GO!
WOW!!!
WOWWW
PAPA! SPINNING!
MM.

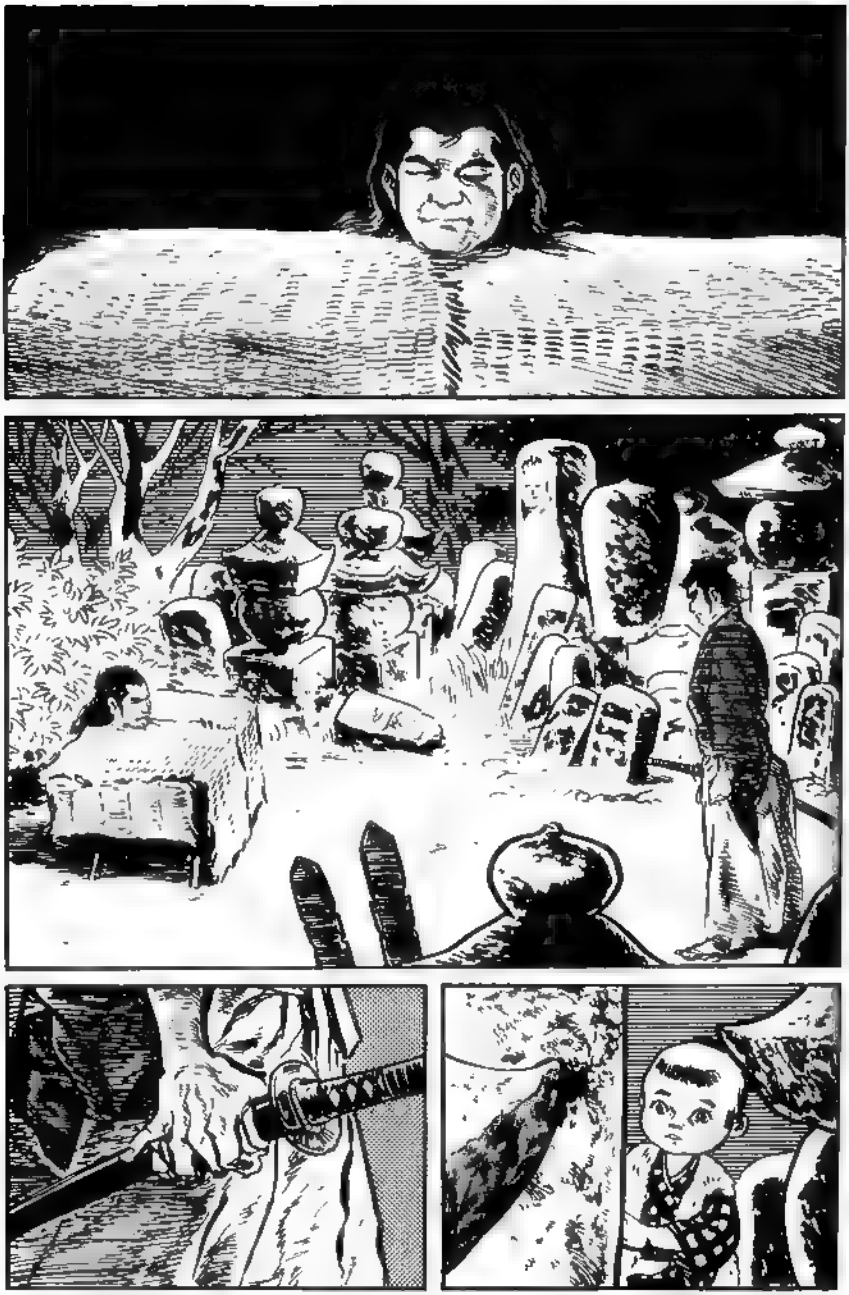
SKKT
CHOK
AH!
SHK
KCHNNG

THE TOP SPINS AND STOPS. YOU MAKE IT SPIN AGAIN...BUT DAIGORO...*OUR* ROAD NEVER STOPS. THE DAY WE STOP IS THE DAY WE ARE SPLIT ASUNDER, LIKE THIS TOP
....
WE'RE LEAVING, DAIGORO.
UHN!
WAIT!
HAVE YOU NO PITY FOR YOUR *SON*?! DON'T YOU WANT HIM TO BE A STRONG, GENTLE, *UPRIGHT* MAN, WITH *COMPASSION* FOR THE SORROWS OF THIS WORLD?!

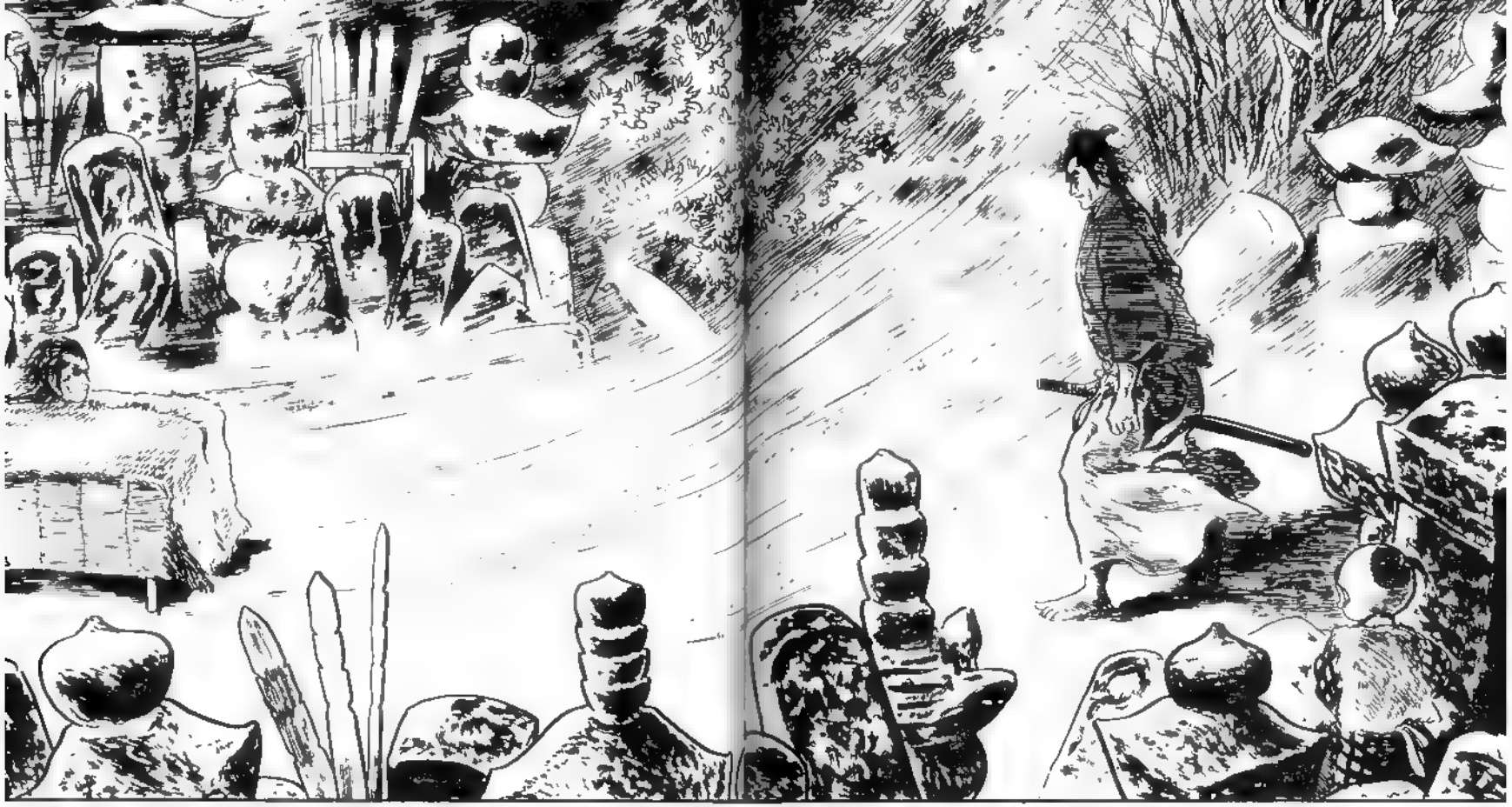
I UNDER-STAND...
I KNOW WHY YOU BOUGHT HIM THE TOP BUT THE PATH WE WALK IS AS I JUST SAID—
WAKING, A HALF MAT SLEEPING, ONE MAT.
RULE THE NATION, A FISTFUL OF RICE.
NO MATTER HOW MANY PEOPLE YOU KILL, COUNTRIES YOU STEAL, FORTUNES YOU PLUNDER, OR TITLES YOU EARN. YOU ONLY COVER A HALF A STRAW MAT WHEN YOU SIT, ONE WHEN YOU SLEEP, AND YOUR STOMACH ONLY HOLDS A FISTFUL OF RICE!
WHY NOT SEE THIS WORLD THROUGH HUMAN EYES? WHY NOT LIVE A HUMAN LIFE FOR YOUR SON?
TOKK
....
....
WE ONLY GET FIFTY YEARS ON THIS EARTH. COMPARED TO THE CYCLE OF REIN-CARNATION, IT IS BUT A FLICKERING SHADOW OF A DREAM.
[redacted] SPEND THAT FLEETING LIFE ON THE ASSASSIN'S ROAD, KILLING AGAIN AND AGAIN FOR MONEY?! ABANDON THE ASSASSIN'S WAY!

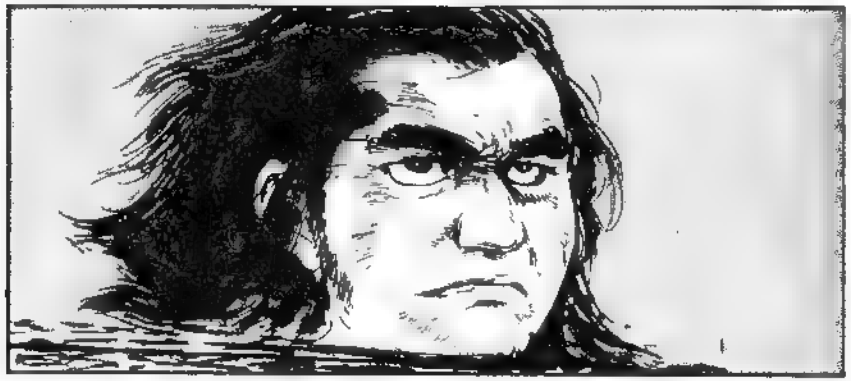
IT IS A PATH WE HAVE SOUGHT AND CHOSEN, FATHER AND SON TOGETHER THERE IS NO GOING BACK, NO GOING ASTRAY!
THE BLOOD THAT SPLATTERS MY BODY CAN BE CLEANSED, BUT THE BLOOD THAT STAINS MY BEING CAN NEVER BE WASHED AWAY!
NO MORE QUEST-IONS!
KILLING FOR MONEY IS EVIL IN THE EYES OF THE WORLD!
NO MATTER WHAT YOUR QUEST, YOU STEAL THE LIVES OF OTHERS FOR YOUR OWN ENDS! I CANNOT PERMIT YOUR ASSASSIN'S ROAD!
....
IT SEEMS IT'S TIME FOR MY BUG! TO DO SOME GOOD.
ABANDON THE ASSASSIN'S ROAD!

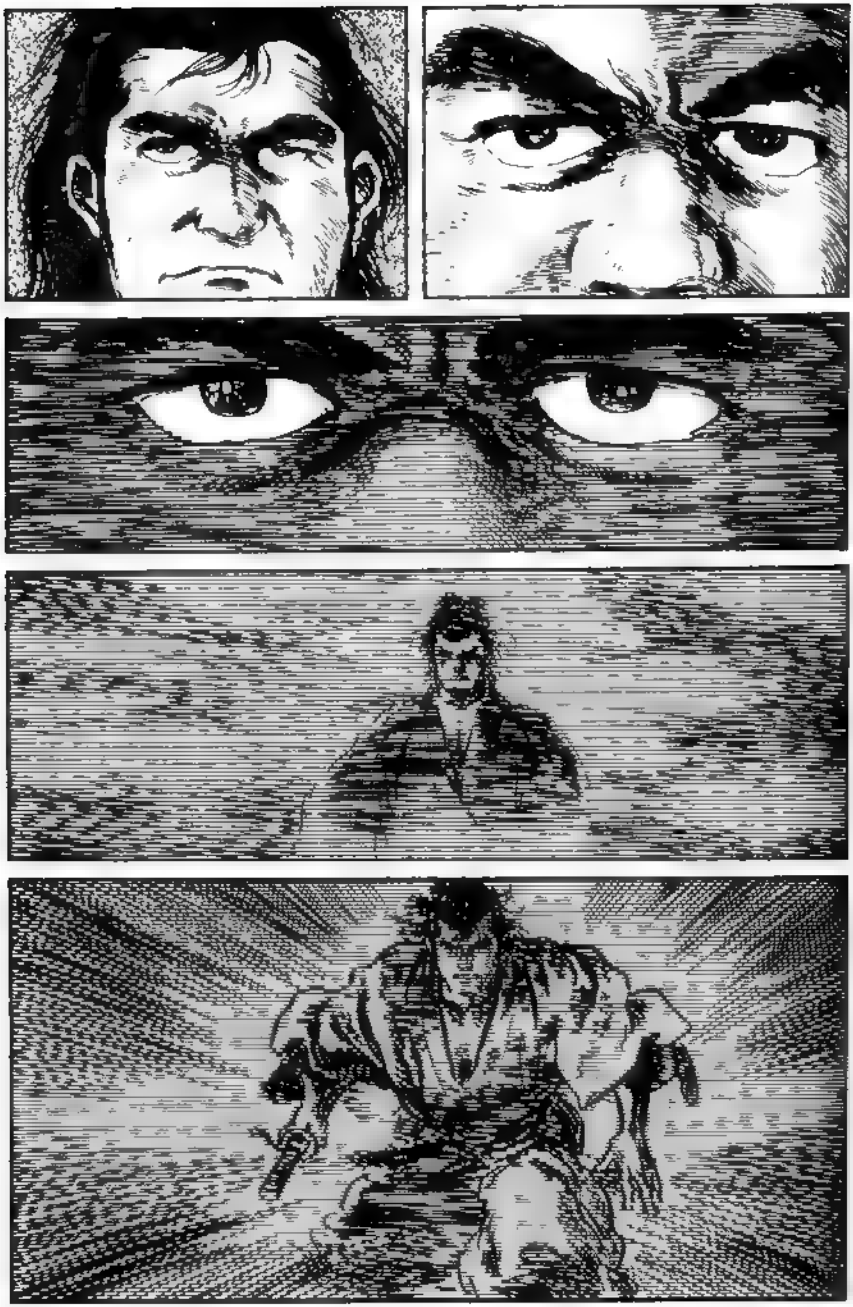
IF NOT, I STAND IN YOUR WAY!
SO BE IT!

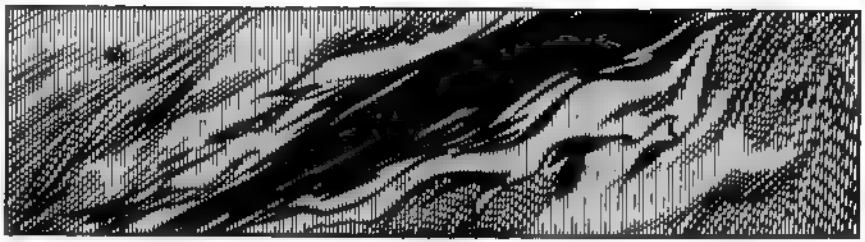


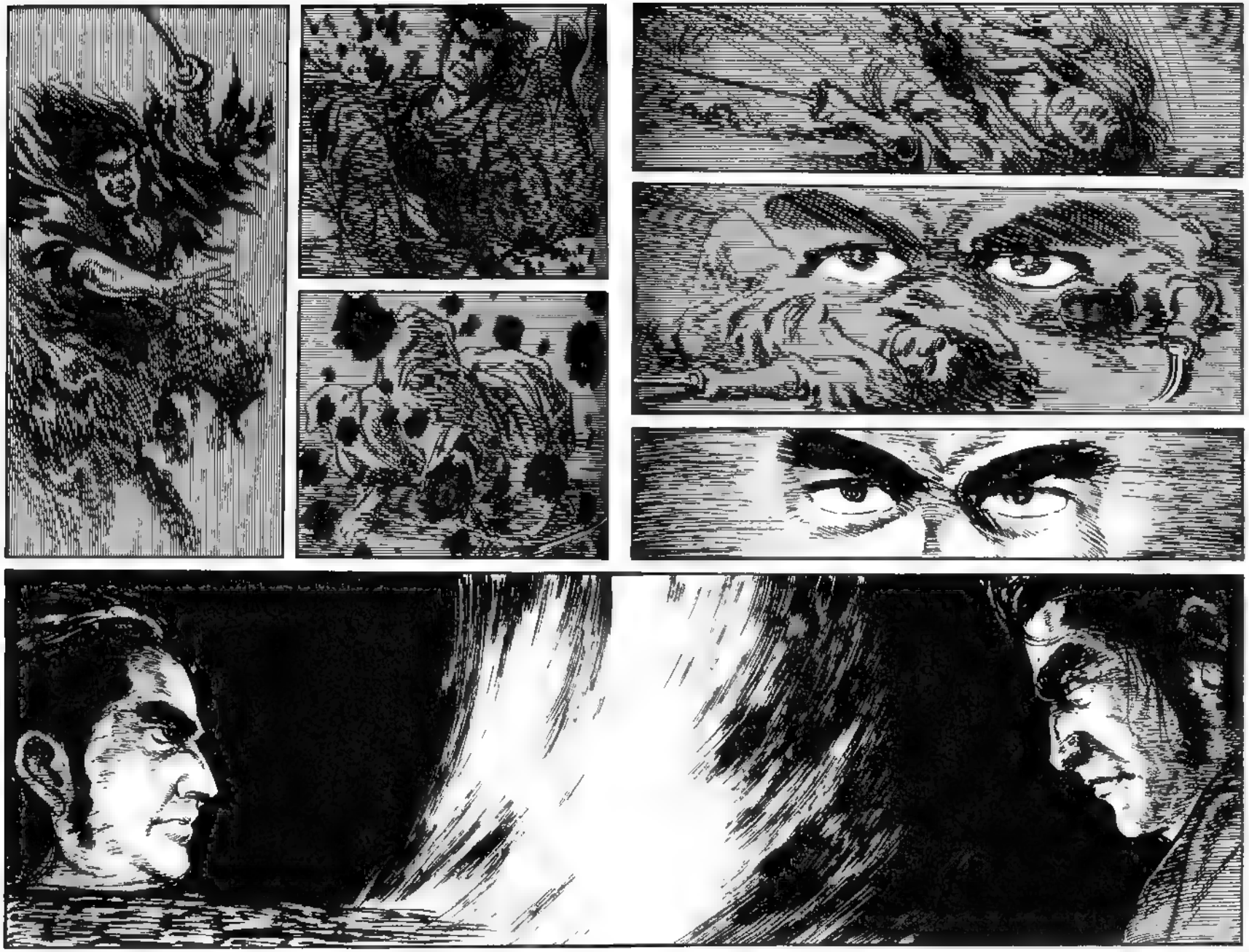
KŌGI KAISHAKUNIN, TAKE THIS HEAD, AND CONTINUE ON YOUR ASSASSIN'S WAY
. . . .
. . . .

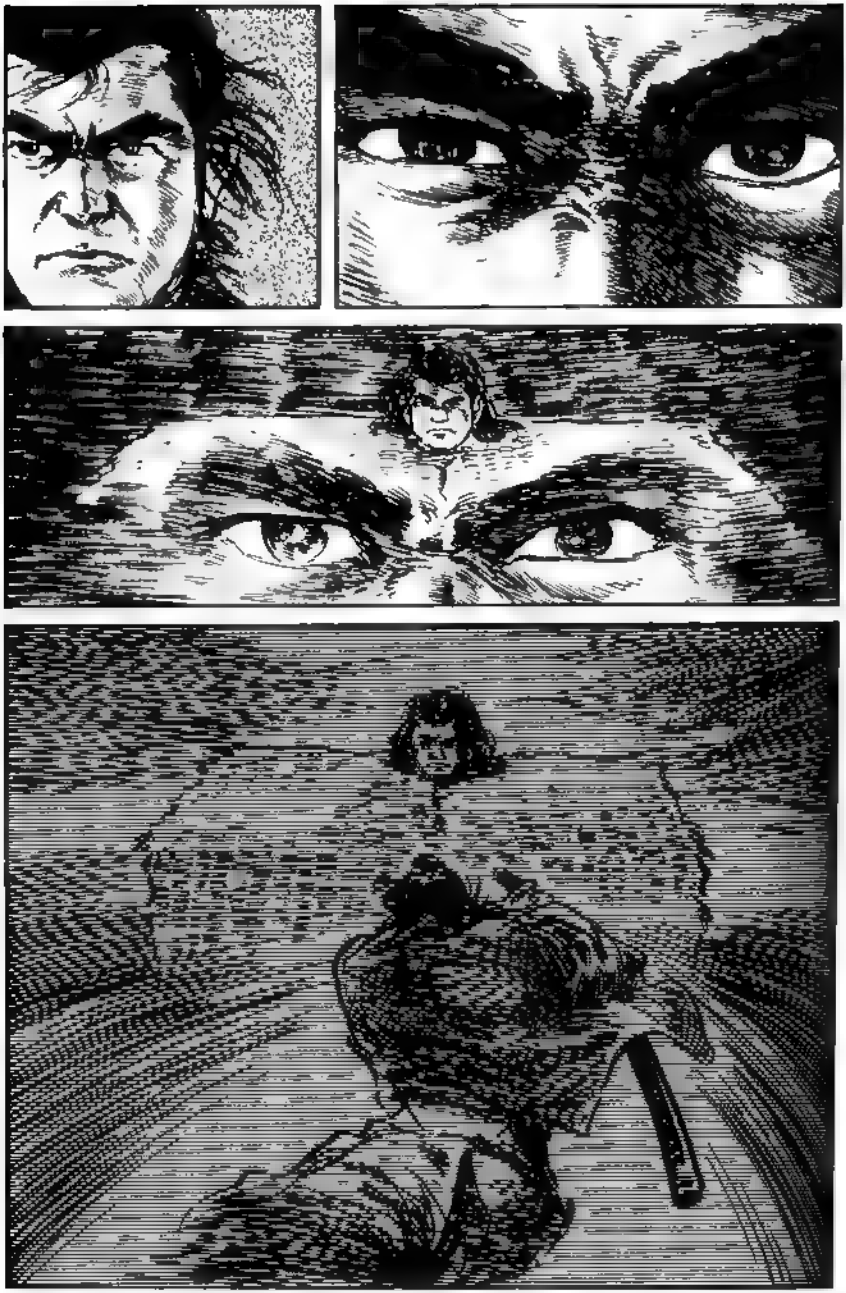


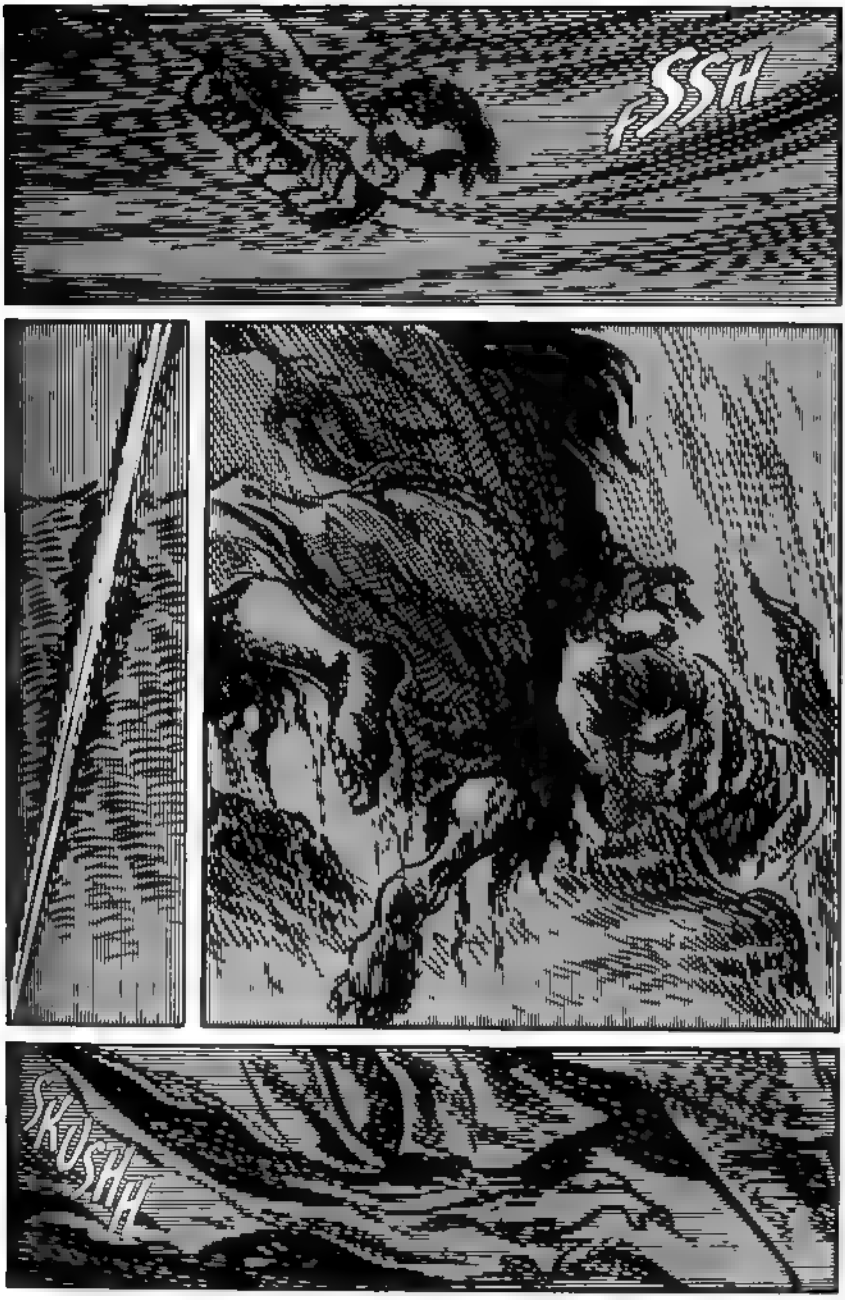


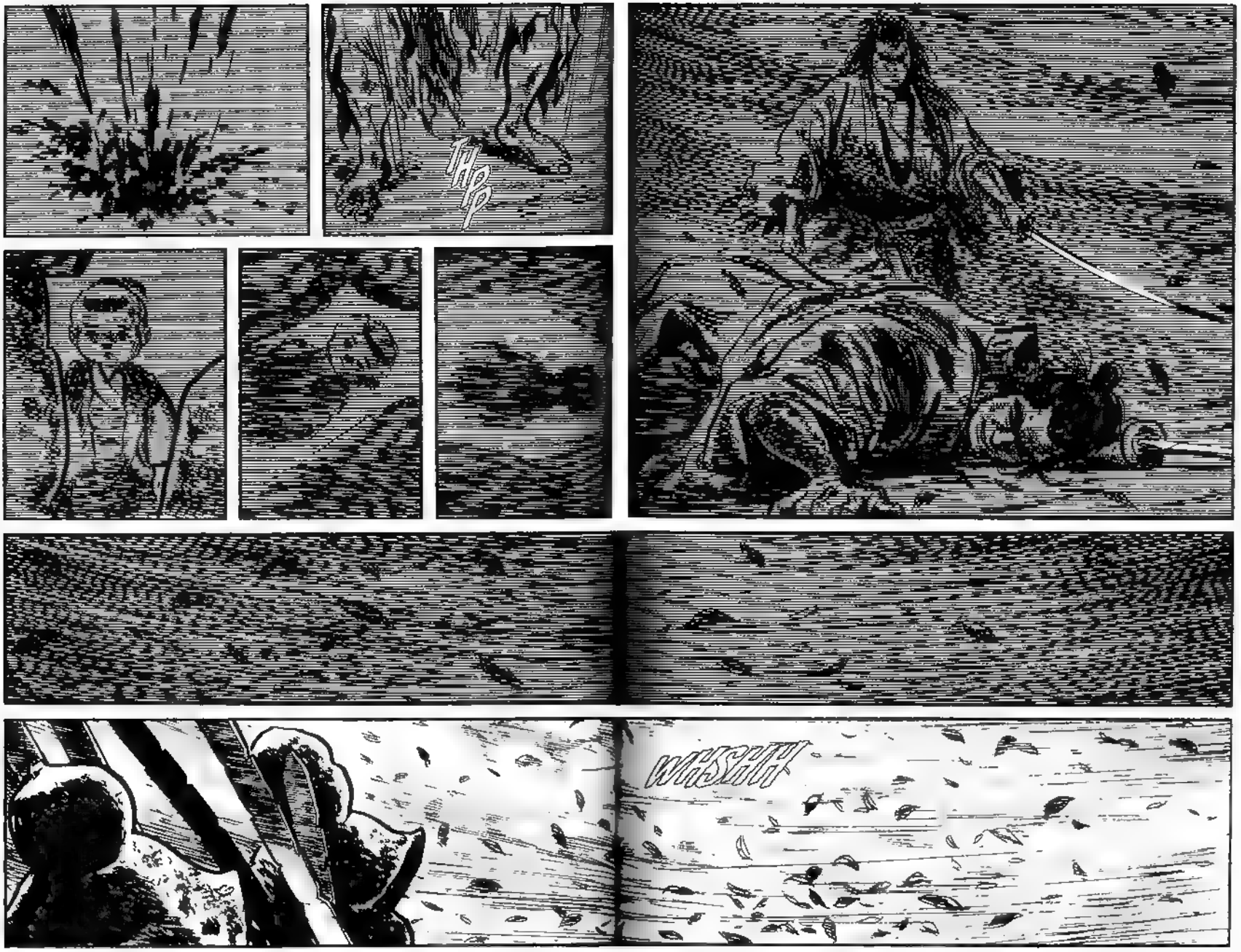




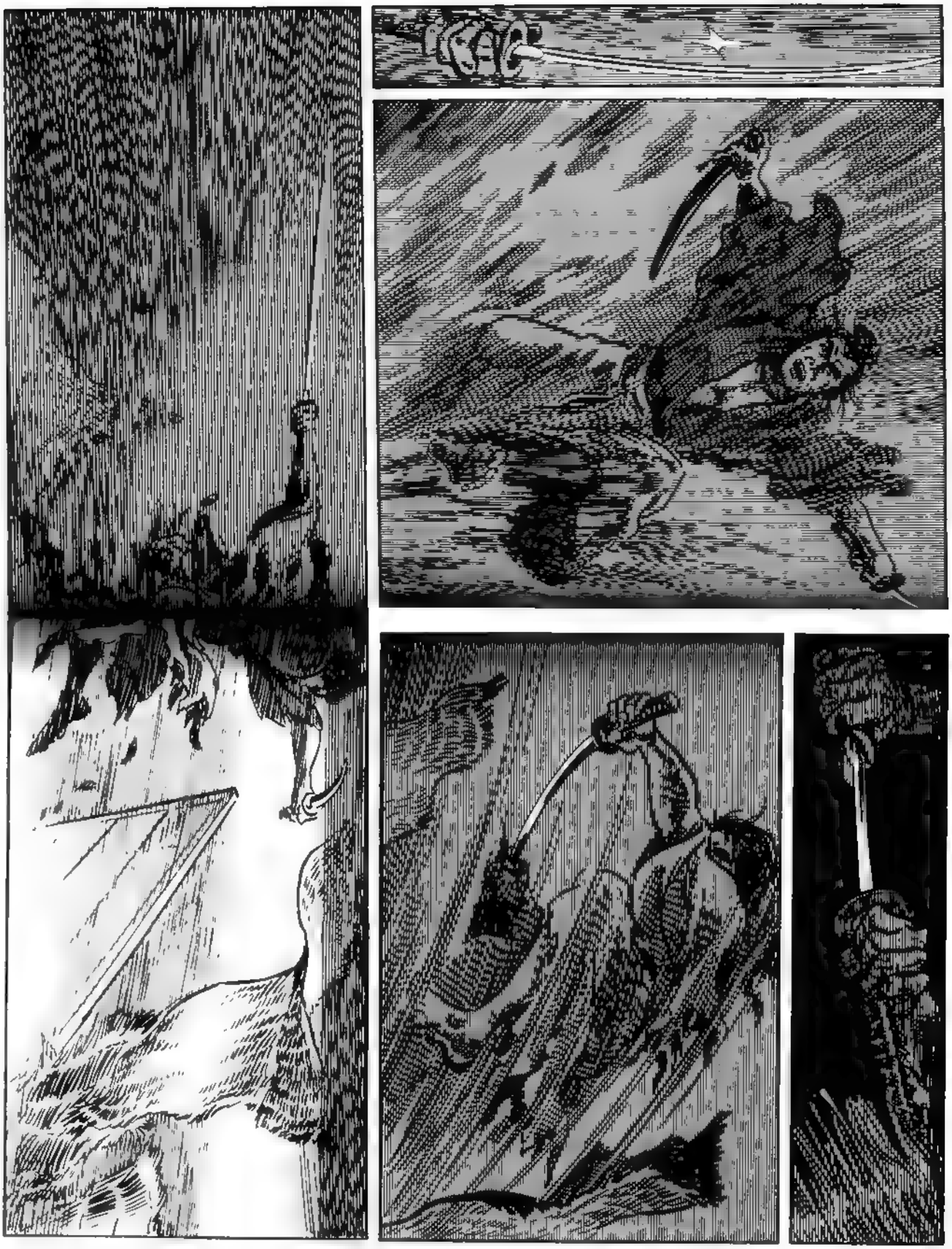


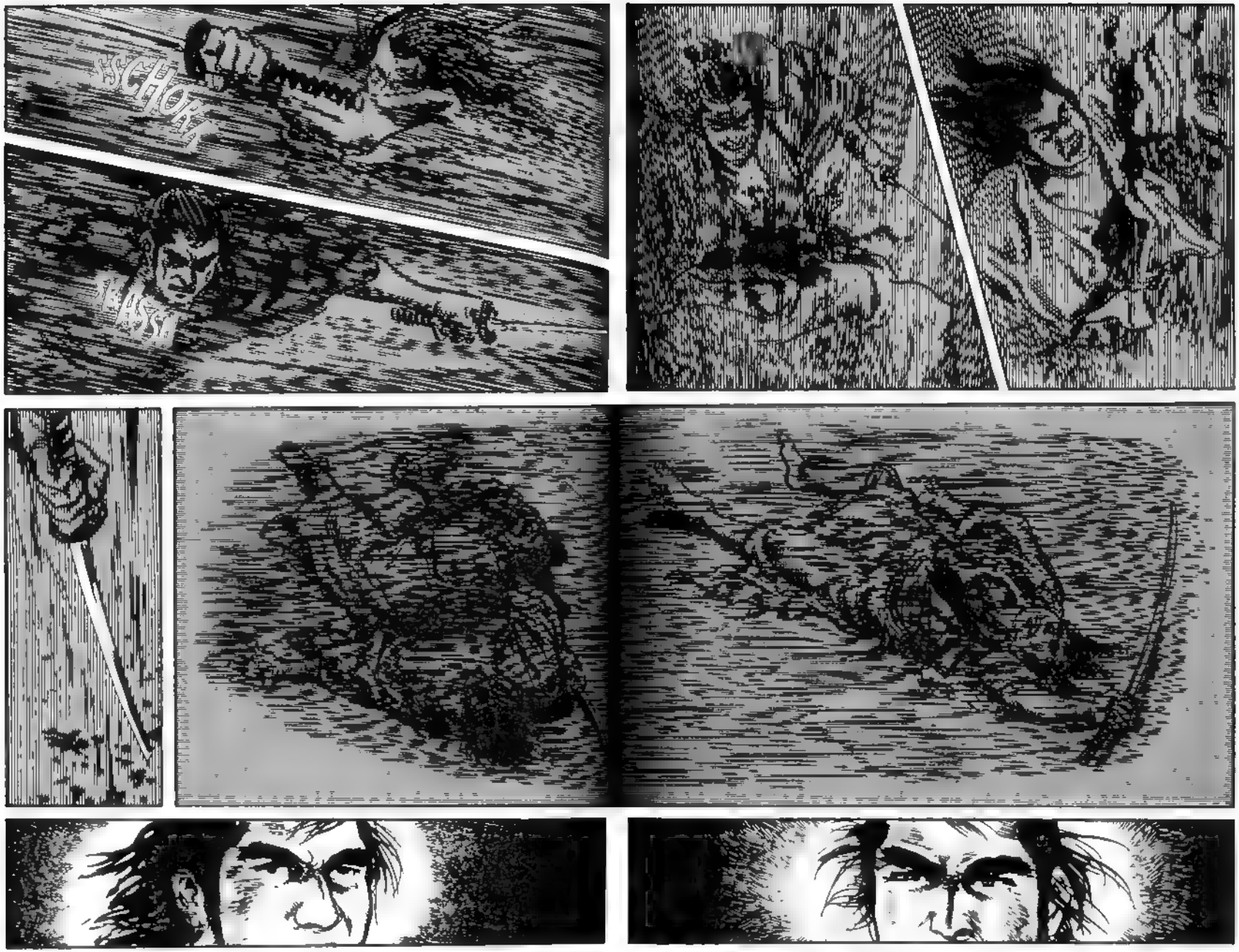


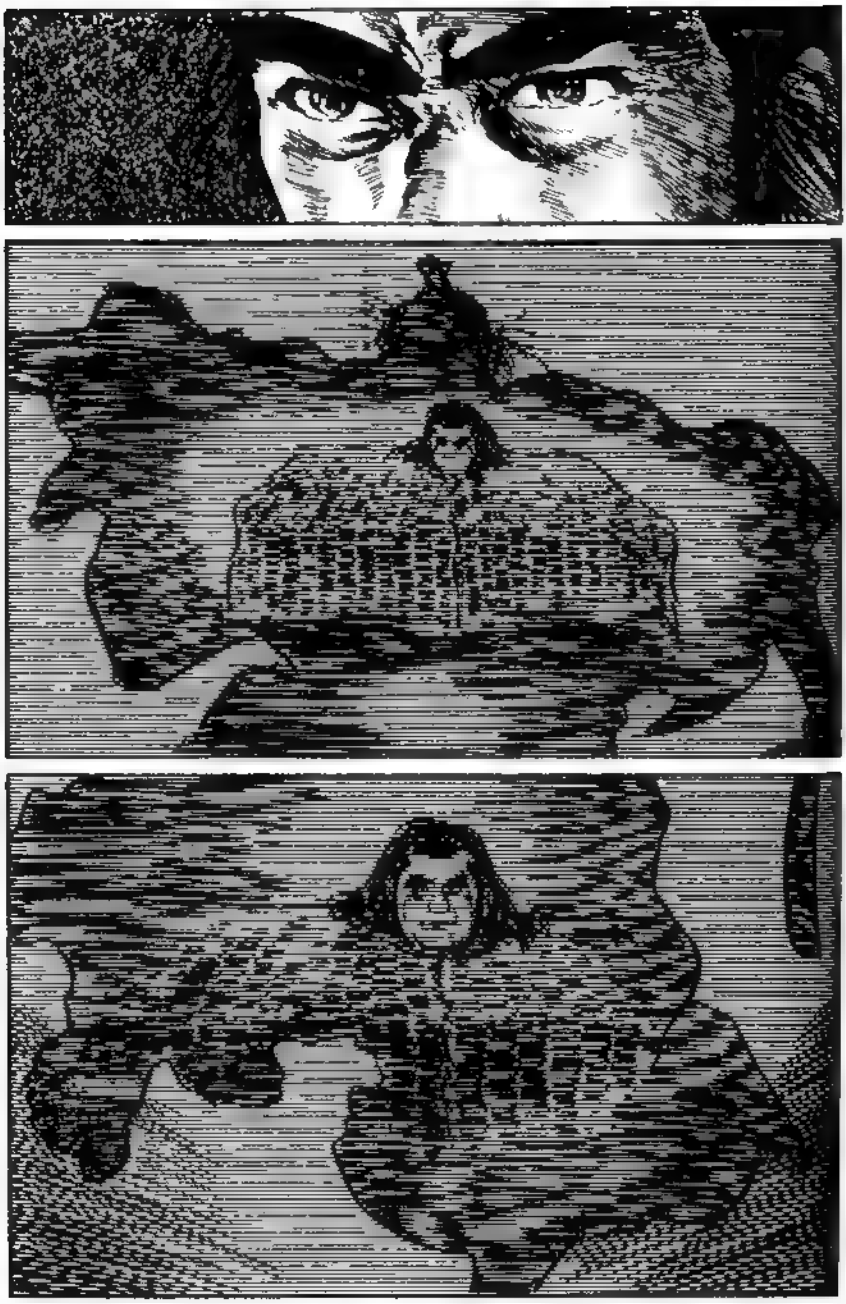

SSSH
SKUSHL


THUD
WHSHH

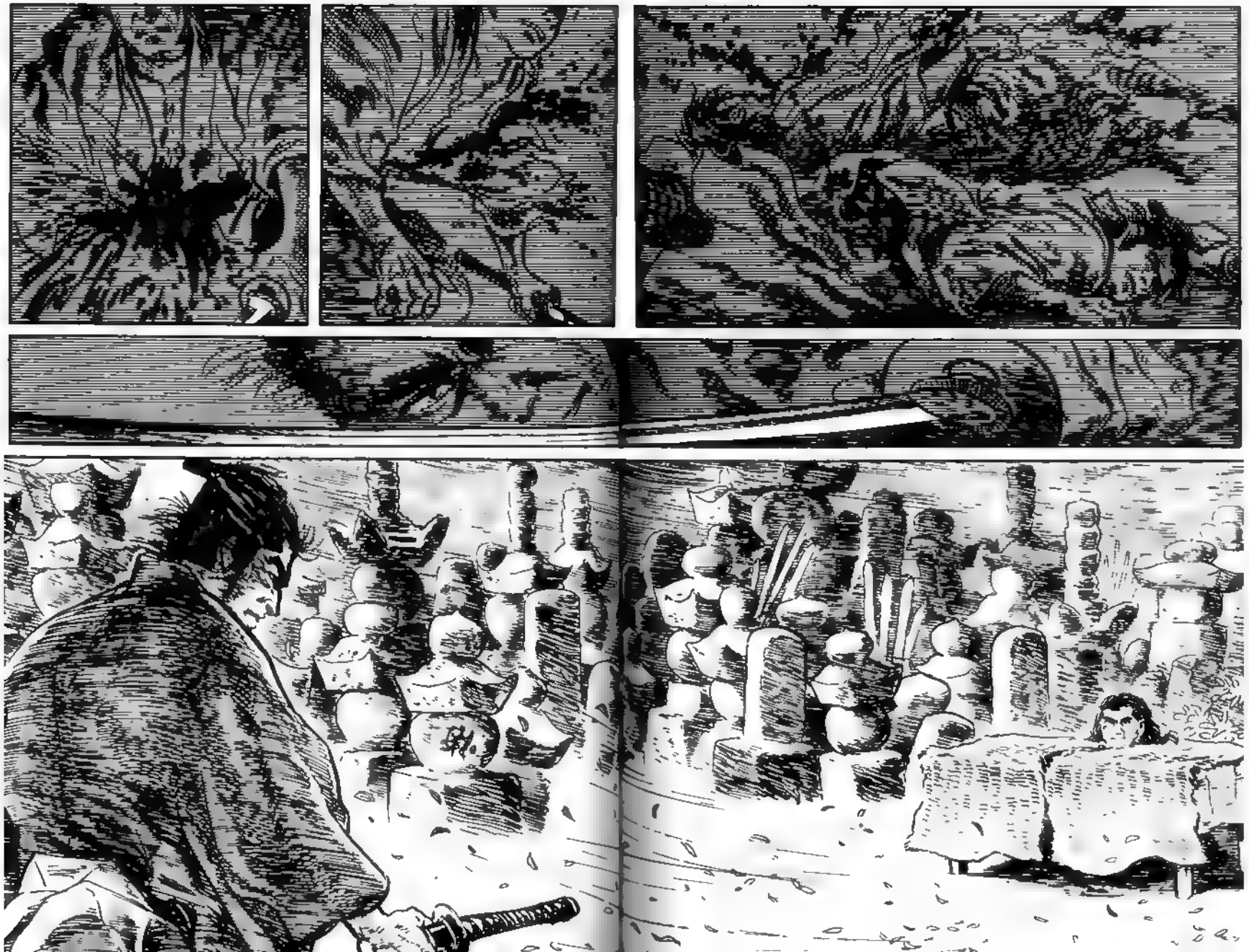
FWHSSHH
WHSSHH
WHSSHH

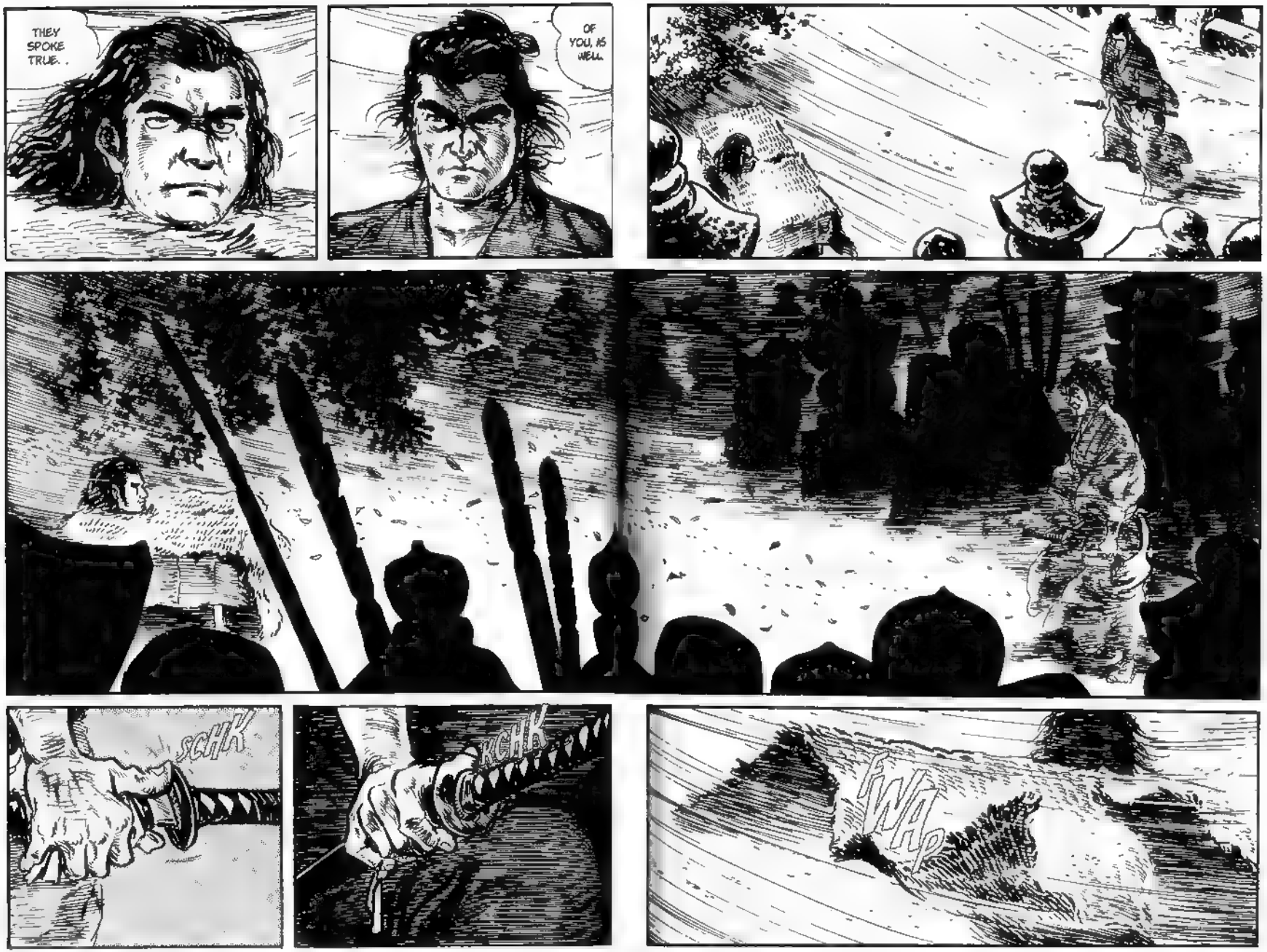


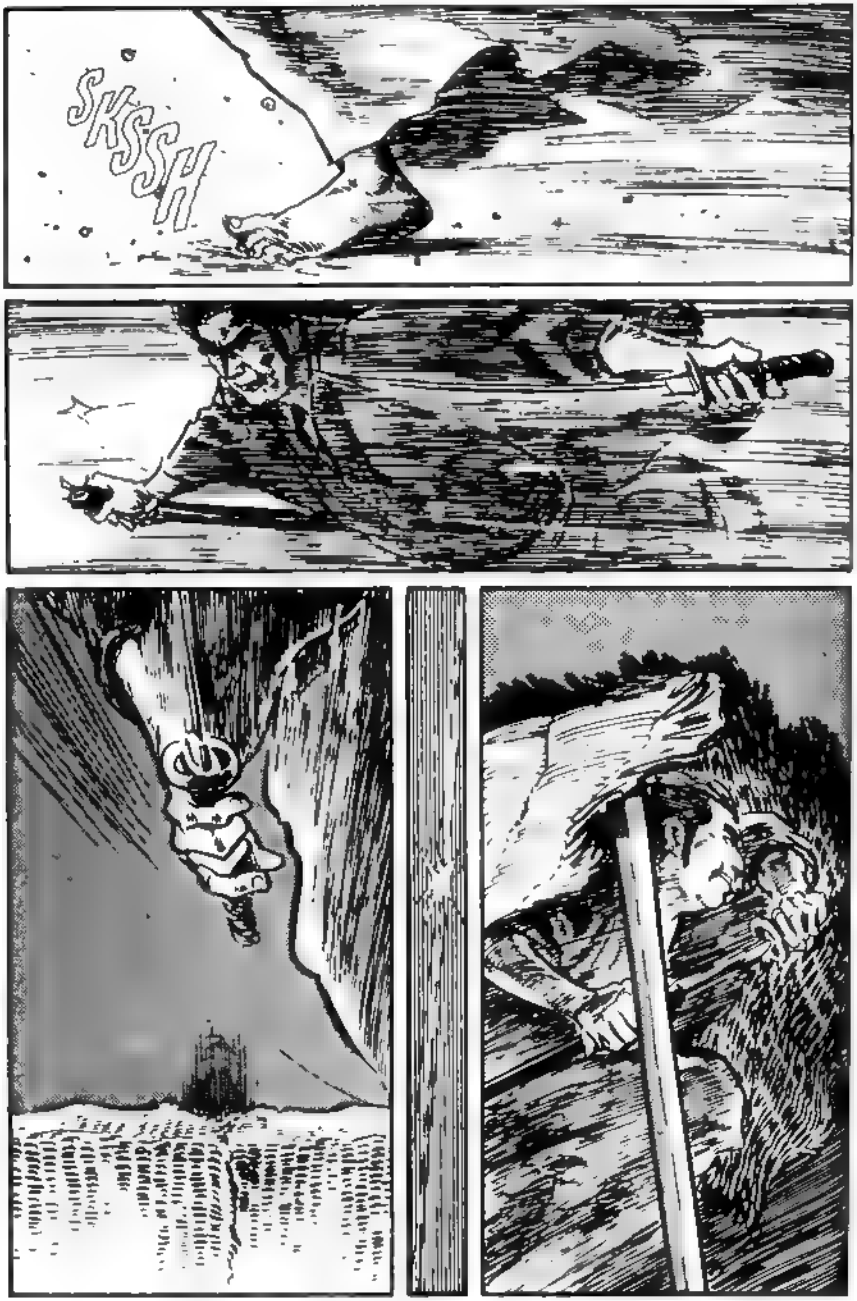

SCHOK
HAST

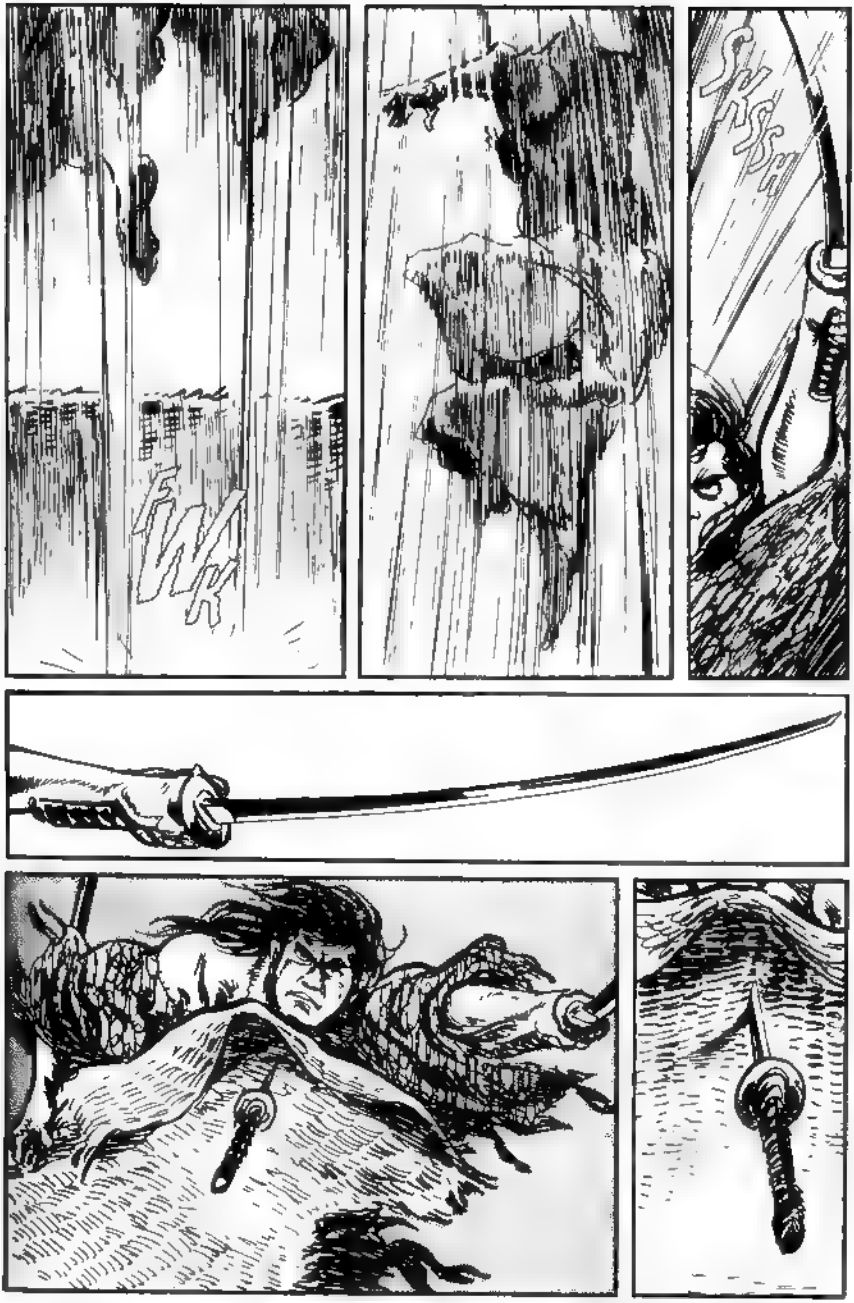


SHOOK
SHUSSH




THEY SPOKE TRUE..
OF YOU, AS WELL.
SCHK
KCHK
FWAP


SKSSH


FWK

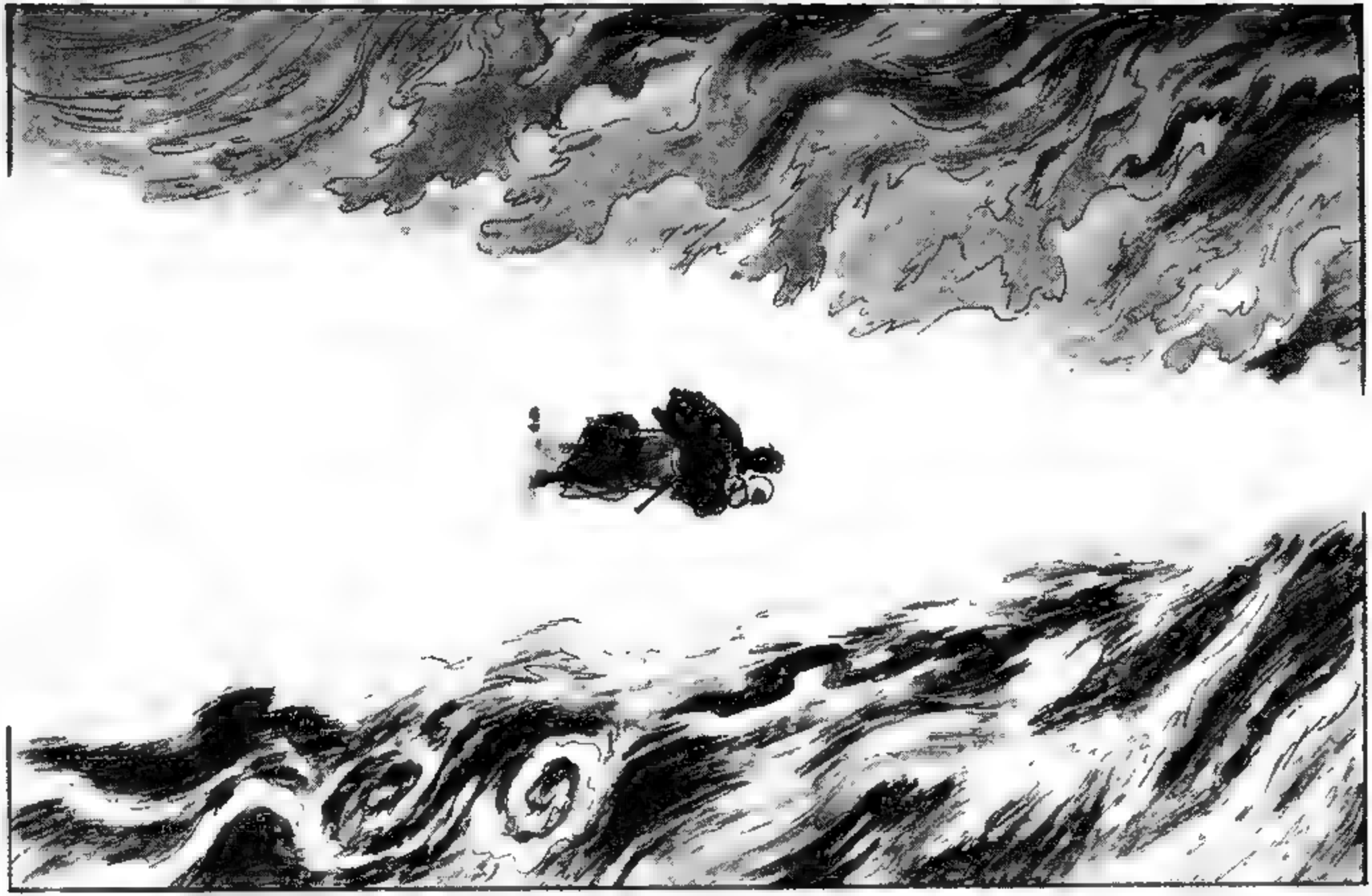
THP
TANK
HMMG
YOU FACED ME IN A CROUCH SO YOU COULD SPRING STRAIGHT INTO THE AIR
IN. INDEED.
THEN WHY DIDN'T YOU LEAP WITHOUT RUNNING?
WHY DIDN'T YOU USE THE MIJIN SCHOOL HISSHŌKEN SOARING STROKE TO STRIKE FROM BELOW?!

I THOUGHT IT A DRAW WITH YOUR SHIIŌ SCHOOL ZANBATŌ.
NO! VICTORY WAS YOURS!
I LUNGED FORWARD, SURE I WOULD WIN. BUT . BUT FOR A SAMURAI TO THROW AWAY HIS SWORD AT THE FIRST STROKE
IF THE SWORD IS A SAMURAI'S SOUL, YES BUT TO ME A SWORD IS A TOOL FOR KILLING, NO MORE SACRED THAN A CLUB OR A SHARD OF ROCK.
HEH HEH HEH. . AND I THOUGHT I'D GIVEN UP BEING A SAMURAI. I GUESS I KEPT THE SOUL. .
HEH. TOO FUNNY
YOU'RE A HOLY TERROR, ŌGAMI ITTŌ! THE PERFECT ASSASSIN, ABANDONING BODY AND SOUL, SEEKING LIFE IN THE MOMENT OF DEATH!
. . . . . .
WAKING, A HALF MAT SLEEPING, ONE MAT RULE THE NATION, A FISTFUL OF RICE. BUT .. BUT
WHEN WE DIE, A FISTFUL OF ASH. THAT'S ALL WE ARE, ŌGAMI ITTŌ! ABANDON THE ASSASSIN'S ROAD!
THINK OF YOUR CHILD'S FUTURE. RETURN TO THE WORLD OF THE LIVING.
HEADLESS SAKON'S.. DYING WISH. .

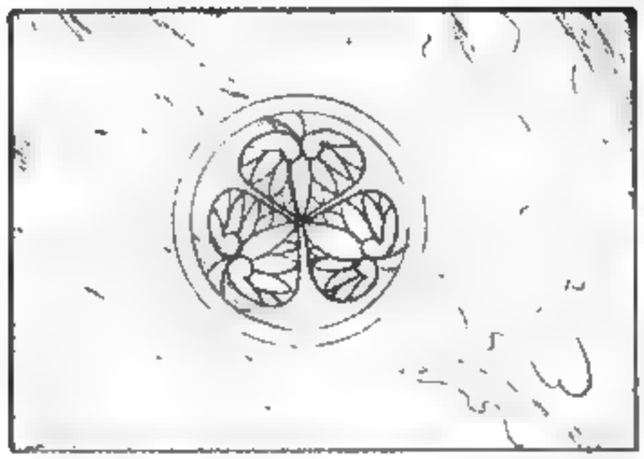
IT IS SAID A PATH CANNOT BE TAUGHT, ONLY LIVED.
BUT THERE ARE SOME LESSONS THAT SEAR THE HEART. THE WAY OF THE HUMAN BEGGAR! THE SIX PATHS ARE MADE SEVEN! I'LL NEVER FORGET YOUR WORDS...
THE WHITE PATH BETWEEN THE RIVERS! WHEN WILL OUR DAY COME..?

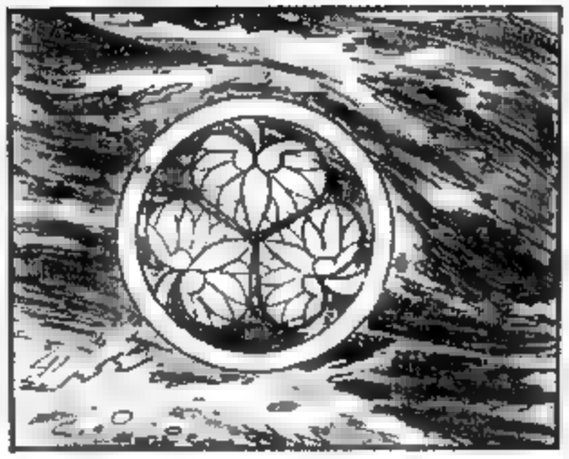
the seventeenth

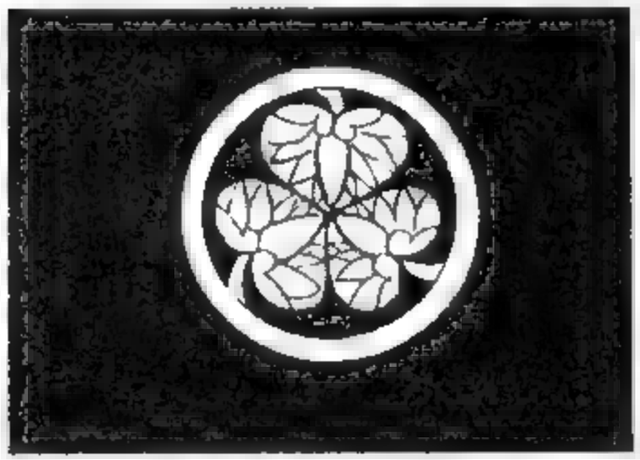
The White Path Between the Rivers

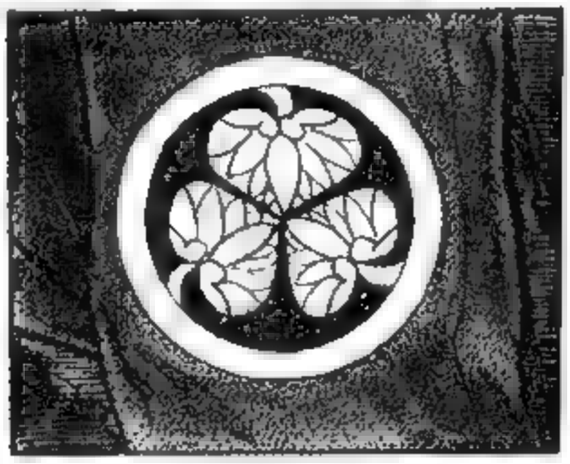


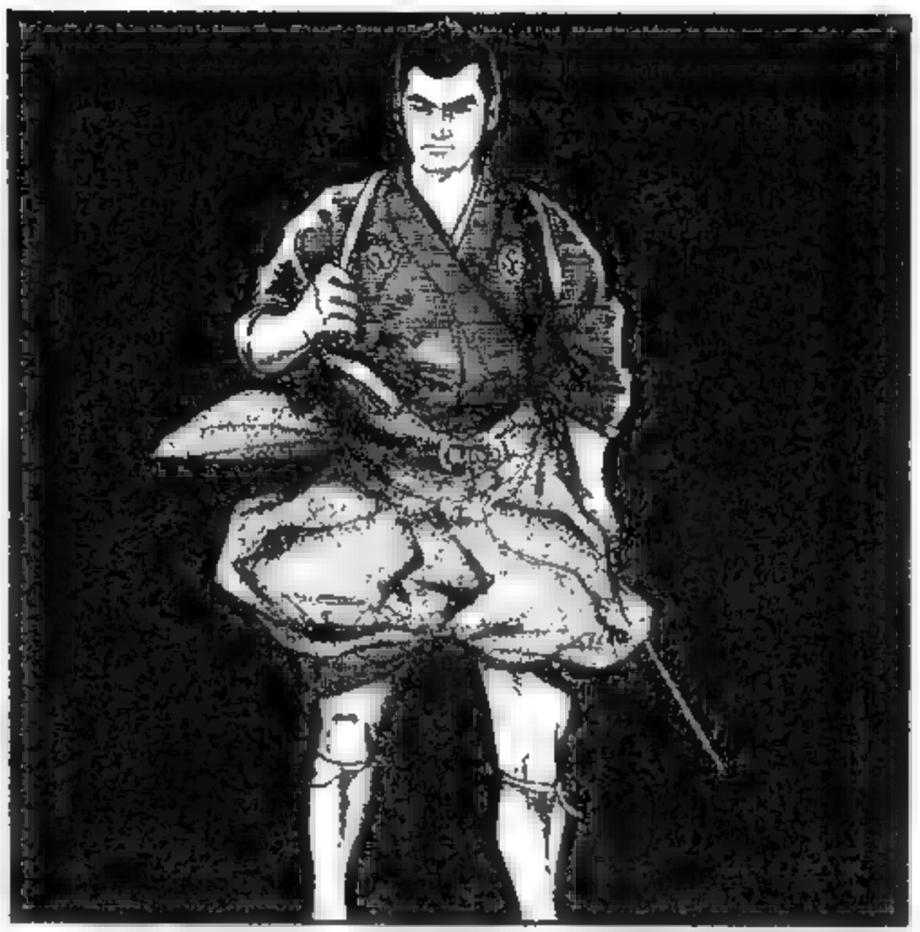
ONE HEART
TWO RIVERS
THE WHITE PATH
ISSHIN NISEN BYAKUDŌ!
IN THE WORDS OF THE BUDDHISTS,
THE RIVER OF FIRE IS THE RIVER
OF JEALOUSY, THE RIVER OF WATER
THE RIVER OF GREED BUT TO HE
WHO DEFIES TEMPTATION AND WALKS
THE WHITE PATH BETWEEN THE RIVERS
WITH PERFECT HEART, TO HIM THE
SHORES OF JŌDO, THE PURE
LAND OF PARADISE.

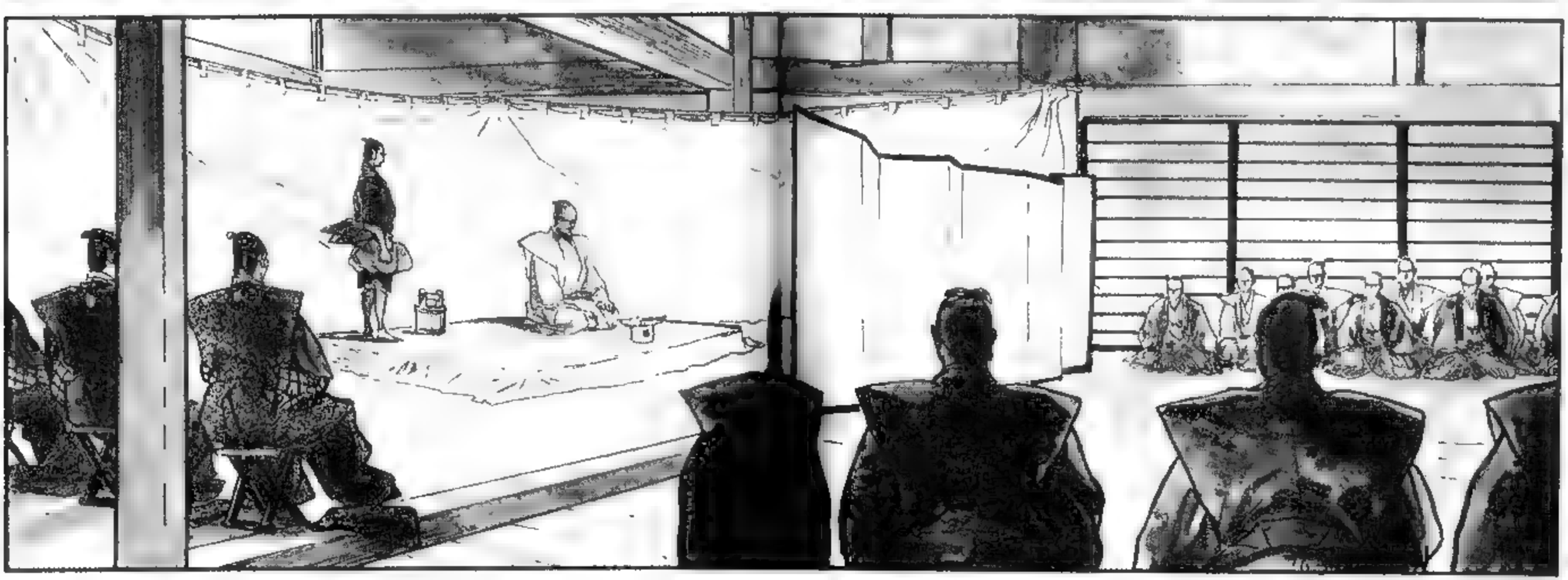






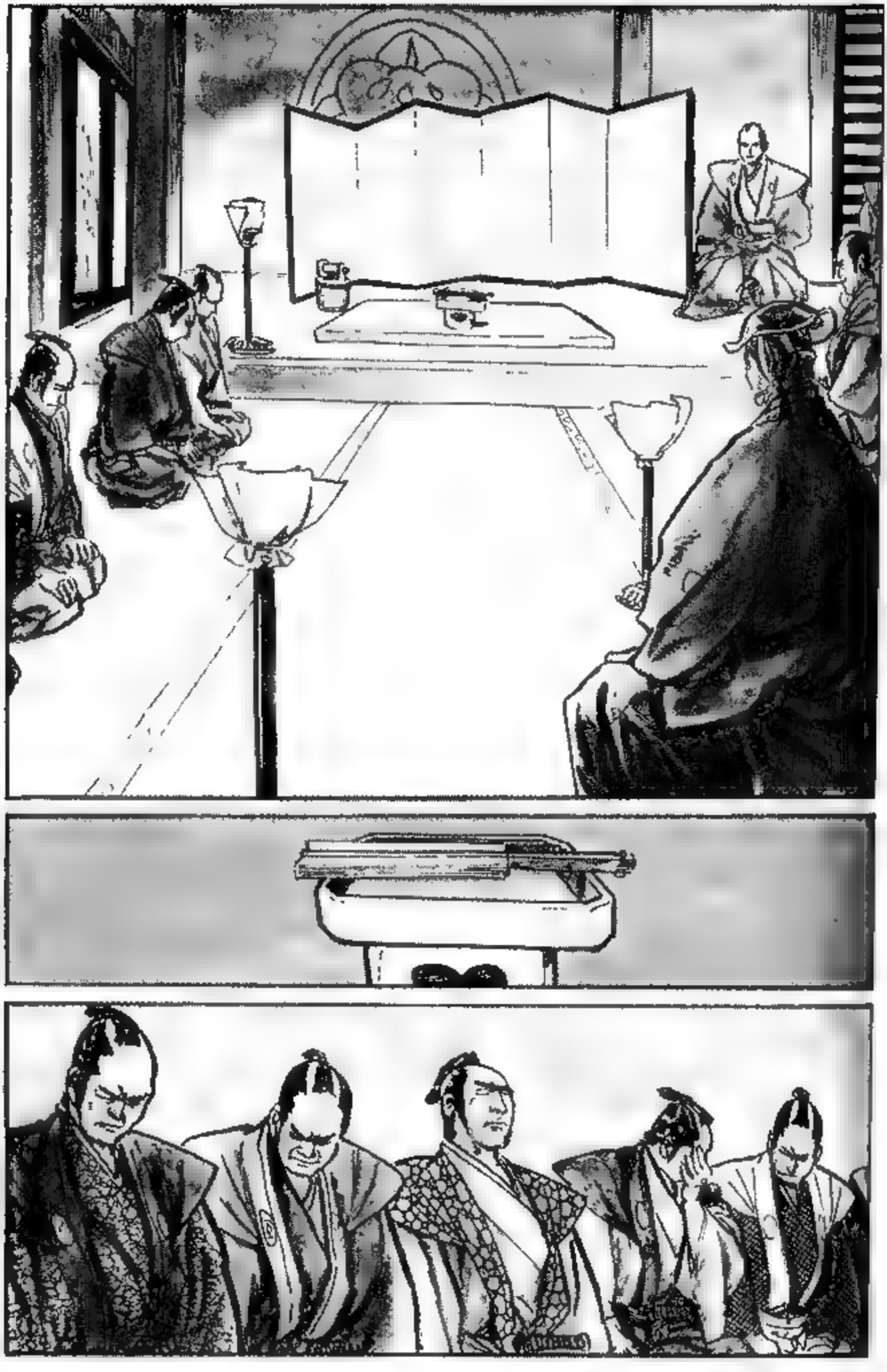


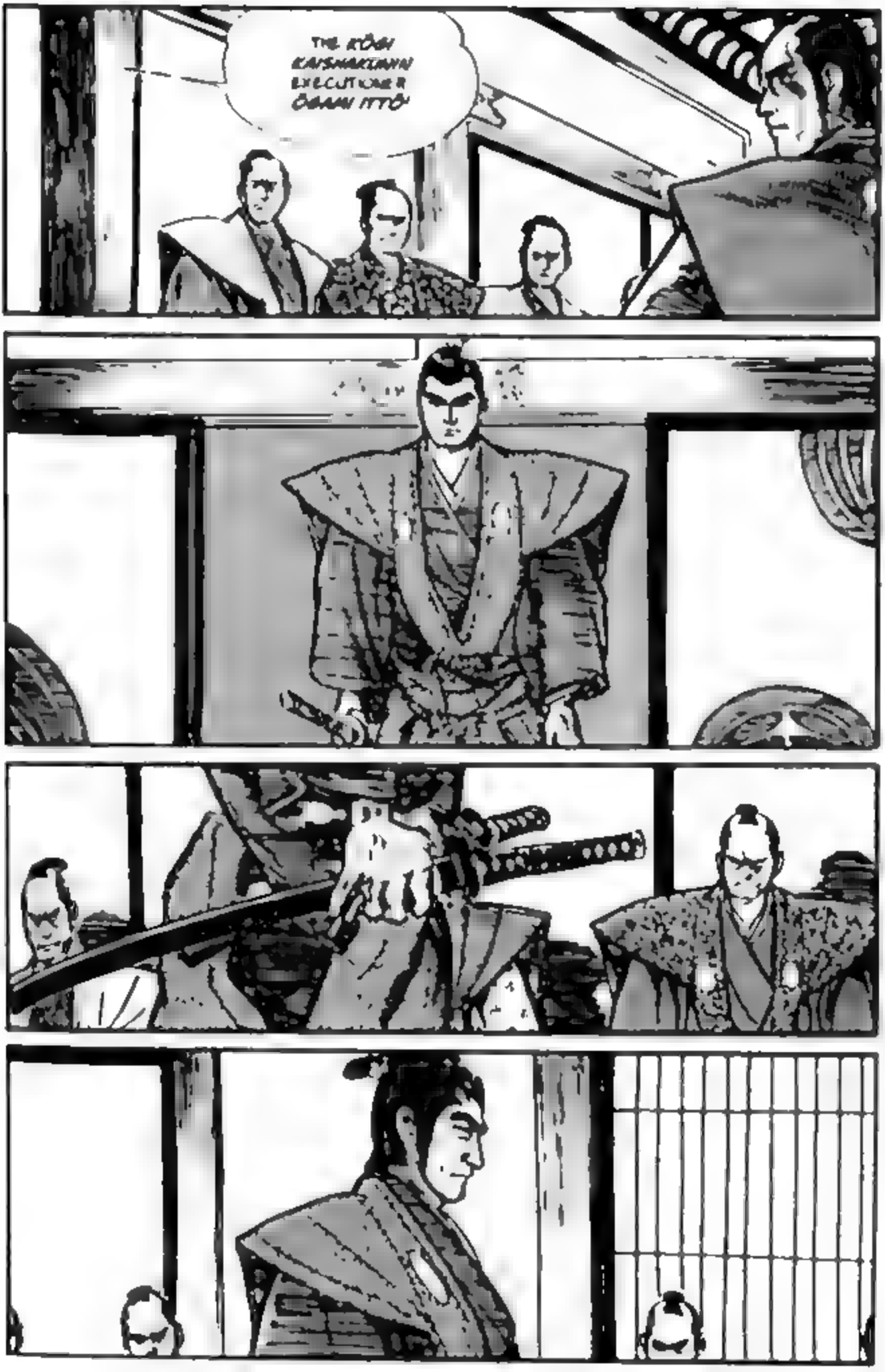




YOU! SERVANT OF THAT HOLLYHOCK CREST! THOUGH MY FLESH BECOME ASH, I SHALL CURSE YOU FOR SEVEN GENERATIONS!

NNGH!
SSSCHOK




THE RŌNIN
KANSHAKUNIN
EXECUTIONER
ŌBAN ITTŌ!

TONO!
TONO! OUR LORD!
TONO!!
TONO!
TONOOOH...!!
KWAAAA

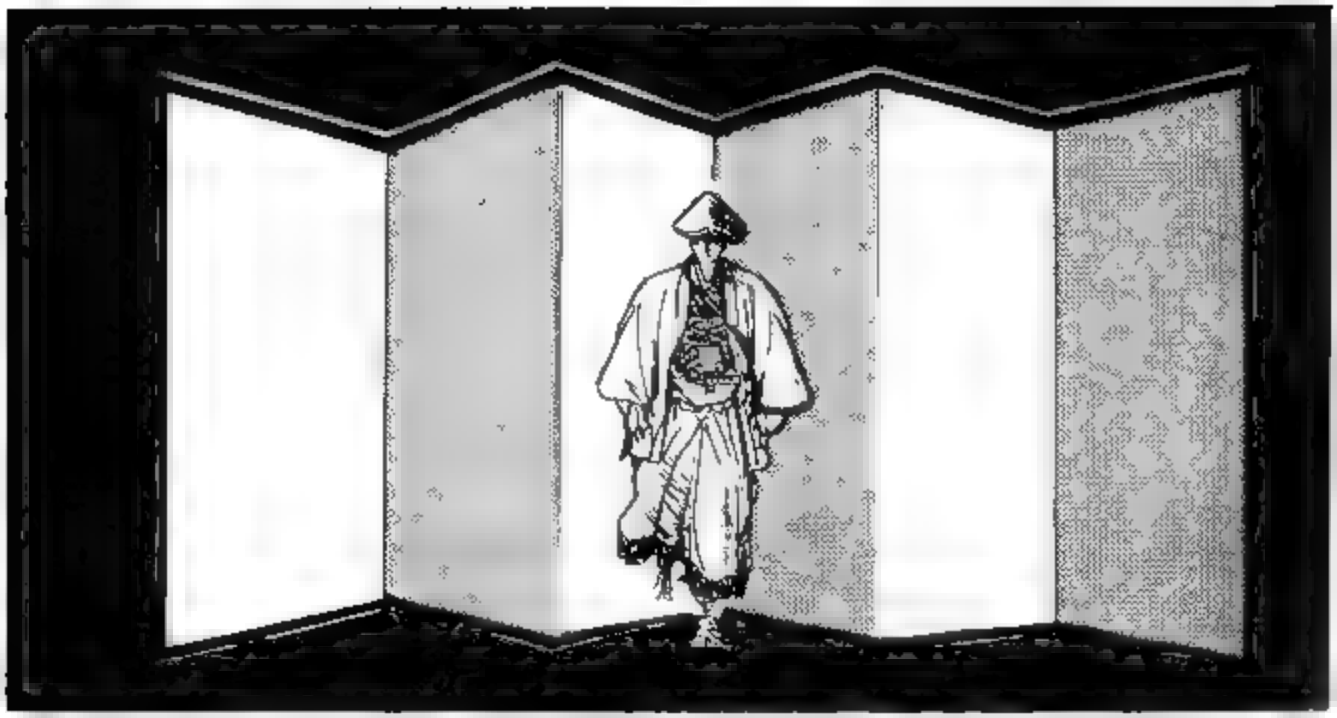
TONO!
E-EVEN IF IT'S THE SHŌGUN'S WILL.. NOT THIS! NOT OUR YOUNG LORD!
TONO...
MY LORD, WE WILL FOLLOW YOU IN DEATH!
CONTROL YOURSELVES!
YOU BESMIRCH THIS SOLEMN MOMENT!
IT IS THE DUTY OF A LOYAL RETAINER TO.. TO AT LEAST..
..WATCH HIS LORD'S DEATH WITH. WITH... DIGNITY..
NNG..
ﾅﾝﾌﾞ!

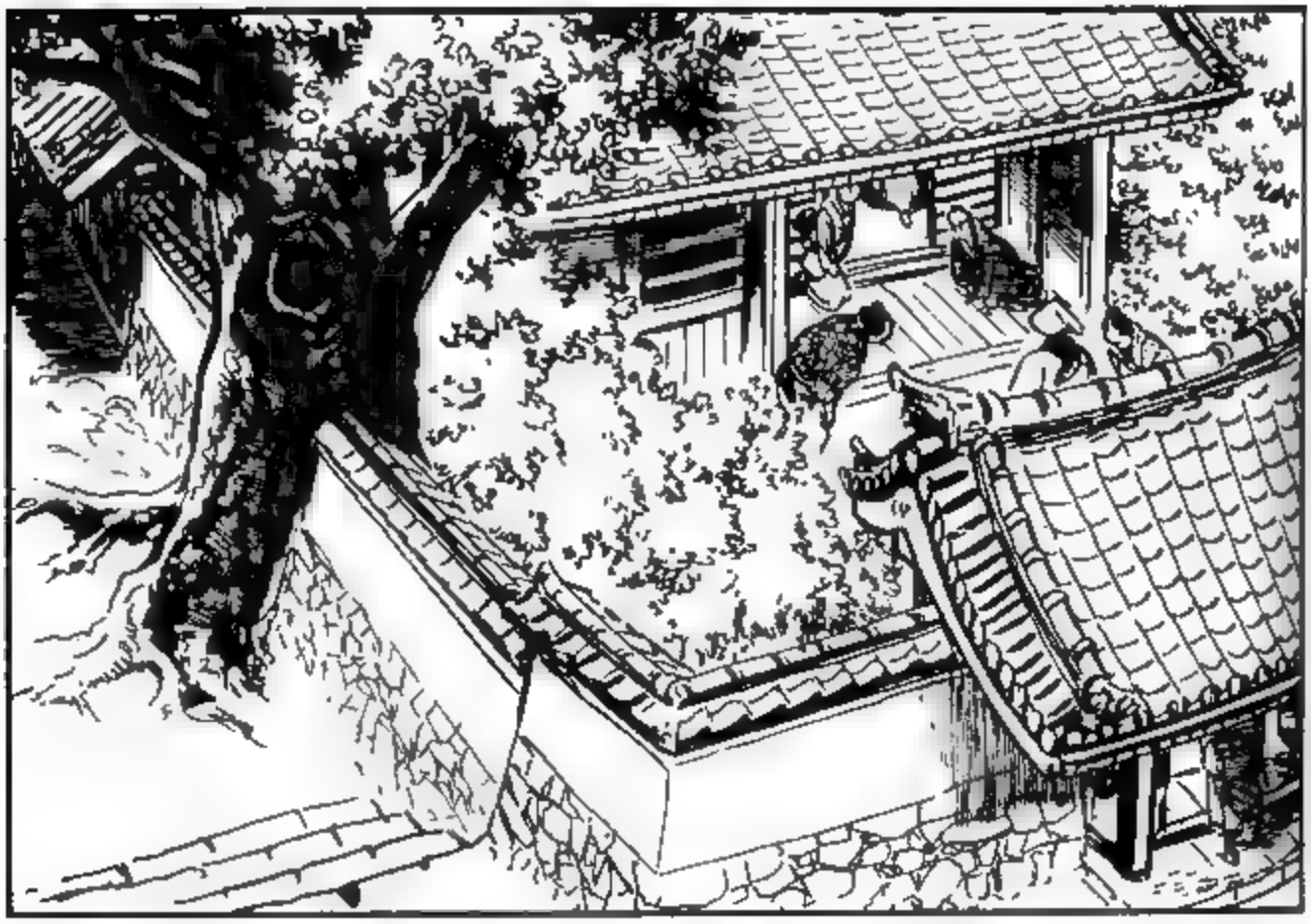
YOU NEED ONLY TOUCH YOUR FAN TO YOUR STOMACH, MY LORD.
READY? CALM YOUR HEART.
SUCH IS A LORD OF COUNTRY AND CASTLE. A SAMURAI AMONG SAMURAI

FOR CENTURIES, THE *TOKUGAWA SHŌGUNATE* CONTROLLED THE *DAIMYŌ* LORDS OF JAPAN'S UNRULY *HAN* WITH AN IRON FIST. THE SLIGHTEST SIGN OF DEFIANCE COULD COST A *DAIMYŌ* HIS TITLE AND HIS LANDS, HIS FAMILY NAME COULD BE ABOLISHED, AND THE LORD HIMSELF BROUGHT TO *EDO CASTLE* FOR DEATH BY *SEPPUKU*. IN TIME, THREE SPECIAL AGENCIES AROSE TO ENFORCE THIS REIGN OF TERROR. FIRST, THE NINJA SPY NETWORK KNOWN AS THE *O-NIWABAN* OR GARDEN WARDENS, DEDICATED TO UNCOVERING EVIDENCE FOR BLACKMAILING AND DESTROYING TROUBLESOME *HAN*. SECOND, THE SHŌGUN'S SECRET *ASSASSINS*, CHARGED WITH KILLING ANY *HAN* OFFICIAL WHO OBSTRUCTED THE SHŌGUNATE'S WILL. AND LAST, THE *KŌSHI KAISHAKUNIN*, THE DESIGNATED SECOND AND FINAL EXECUTIONER AT A *DAIMYŌ'S SEPPUKU* DEATH.

UNDER THE UNCOMPROMISING CODE OF *BUSHIDŌ*, THE WAY OF THE WARRIOR, IT WAS UNTHINKABLE FOR A *DAIMYŌ'S* RETAINER TO TURN HIS SWORD UPON HIS MASTER, EVEN TO END THE AGONY OF *SEPPUKU*. AND THUS THE SHŌGUN APPOINTED HIS OWN CHOSEN *KŌSHI KAISHAKUNIN* TO PERFORM THE FINAL CUT FOR A DISHONORED LORD. THIS EXECUTIONER WAS ALLOWED TO BEAR THE HOLLYHOCK CREST OF THE *TOKUGAWA CLAN* ITSELF ON HIS ROBES OF OFFICE. SYMBOLICALLY, IT WAS THE SHŌGUN HIMSELF, AND NO OTHER, WHO CUT OFF THE HEADS OF THE *DAIMYŌ*.

ŌGAMI ITTŌ WAS THIS CHOSEN MAN, THE *KŌSHI KAISHAKUNIN*, SELECTED BY THE SHŌGUN HIMSELF TO SERVE AS HIS EXECUTIONER IN THE HOLLYHOCK ROBES OF THE TOKUGAWA CLAN.





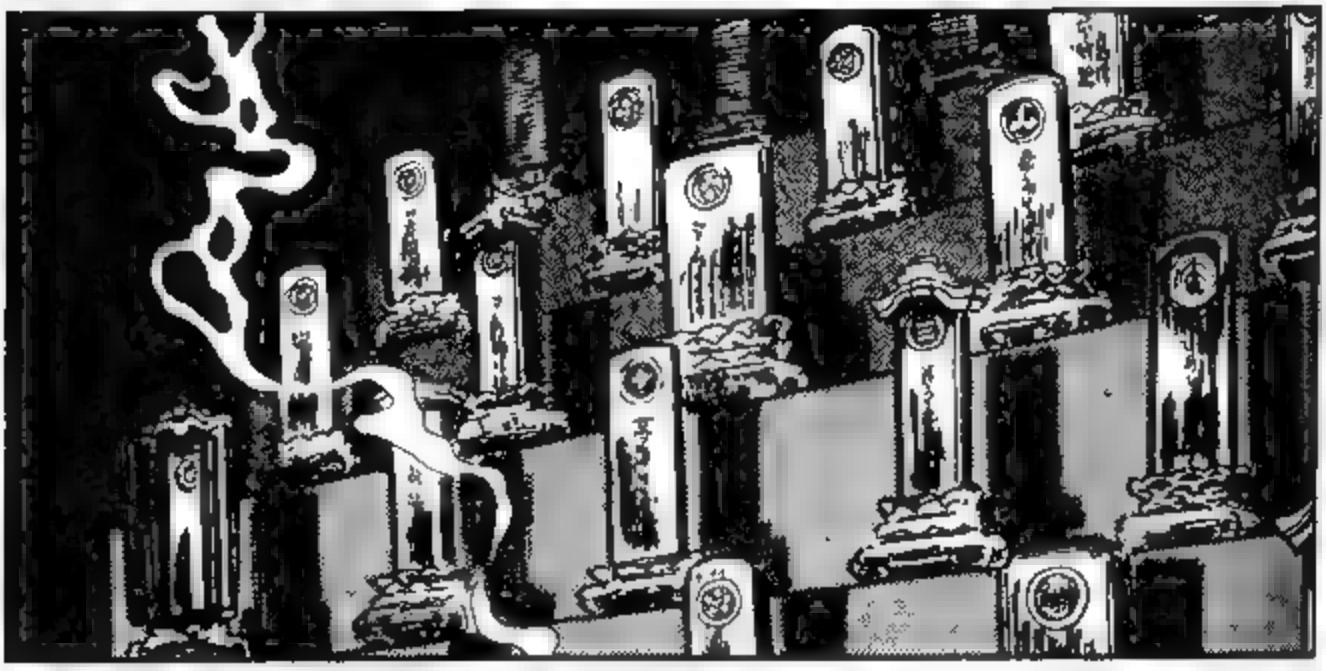
WELCOME HOME, MY LORD YOU MUST BE TIRED..
AH. AKANI.. ENOUGH. LAY YOURSELF DOWN.

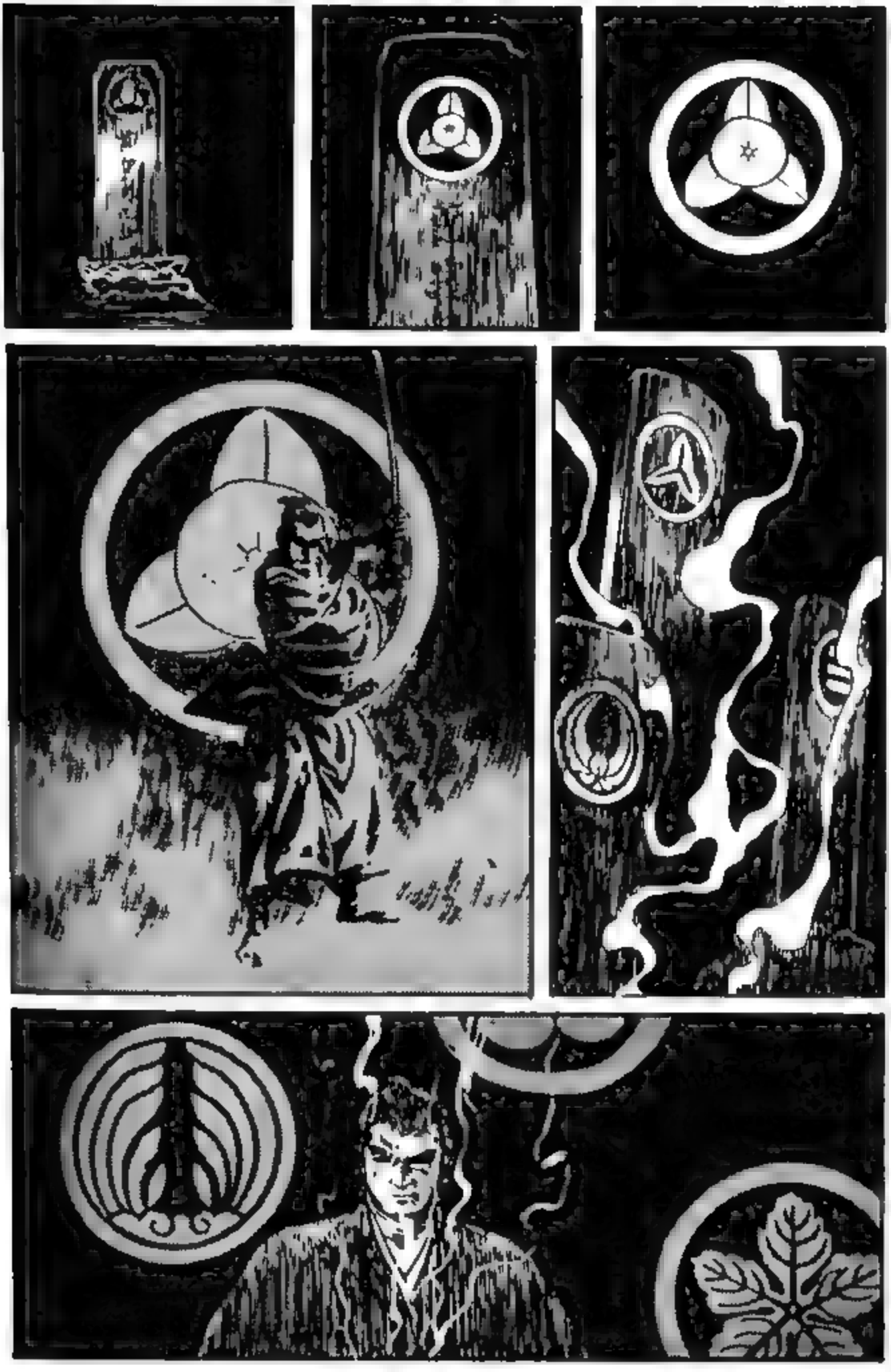
HOW ARE YOU FEELING..?
ACTUALLY..
....
....

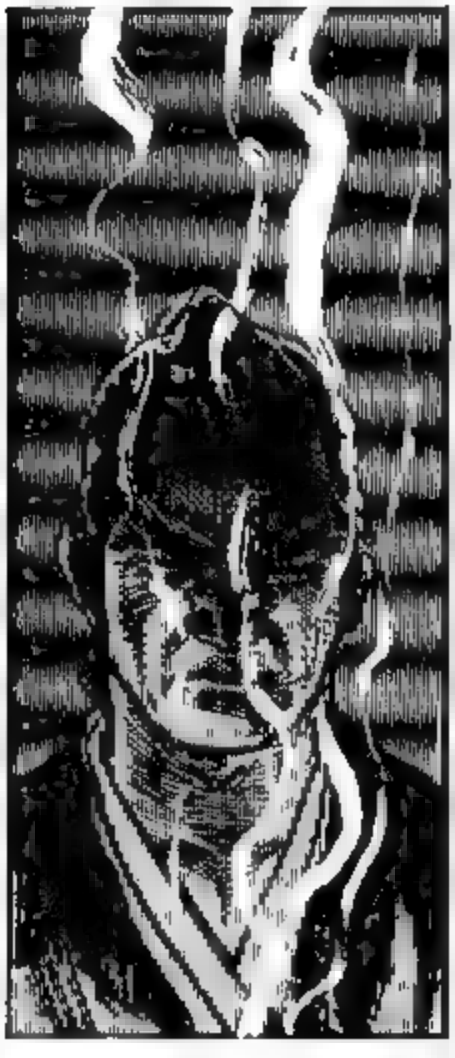
HUSBAND!
NN!
IS SOMETHING WRONG?
DO YOU THINK OUR CHILD WILL BE ALL RIGHT?
WHAT TROUBLES YOU? TRY TO TELL ME.
I... I WILL TRY...
OF LATE I HAVE SEEN... THE MOST AWFUL DREAMS, AGAIN AND AGAIN
. . . .
. . . .
I THINK IT'S THE SOULS OF THE DAIMYŌ YOU HAVE BEEN HONORED TO EXECUTE...
THEIR SCREAMS ECHO FROM LAKES OF BLOOD, NEEDLE-POINTED MOUNTAINS, HOWLS THAT WOULD MAKE YOUR HAIR STAND ON END. CURSING...
. . . .
. . . .
THEY CURSE OUR COMING CHILD, HUSBAND!
THEY SAY THEY CURSE THE ŌGAMI CLAN... OVER AND OVER THEY SAY IT...
THIS IS FOOLISHNESS!

YOUR PREGNANCY NEARS ITS END. IT IS A MOTHER'S FEARS AND CONCERNS FOR HER CHILD THAT SPIN THESE VAPORS. THINK NO MORE ABOUT IT
YES, HUSBAND. FORGIVE ME. BUT, BUT...
ENOUGH!
IT'S NOT LIKE A STRONG WOMAN LIKE YOU!
YE-YES, MY LORD.
IF THE CHILD YOU BEAR SHOULD BE A BOY, WE WILL NAME HIM DAIGORO.
.....
.....
UNDAUNTED BY POVERTY, UNSPOILED BY WEALTH!
IT IS THE NAME OF A MAN WHO CAN LIVE FORTHRIGHTLY IN HIS KNOWLEDGE OF THE FIVE REALMS OF HELL, FAMINE, BEAST, SLAUGHTER, AND HEAVEN, AND GAIN TRUE FREEDOM IN THE CYCLE OF INCARNATION.

TO THE FIVE, ADD THE SIXTH- HUMAN!
"DAIGO" CAN BE BOTH THE FIVE REALMS, AND THE MOMENT OF ENLIGHT- ENMENT
DAIGORO ŌGAMI DAIGORO...
FEAR NOT! THE SIX ROADS, THE FOUR LIVES! YOU SHALL BEAR A STRONG CHILD, INDOMITABLE IN THE FACE OF ALL ADVERSITY!
MY HUSBAND..!
MM..



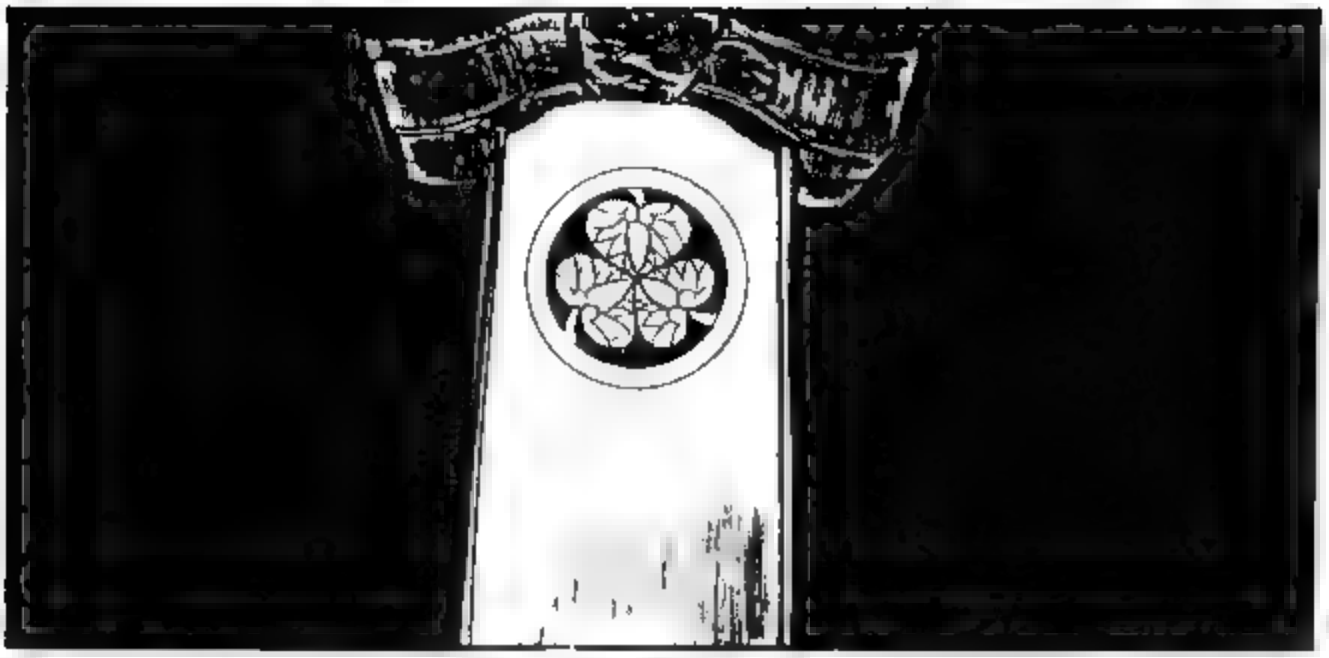


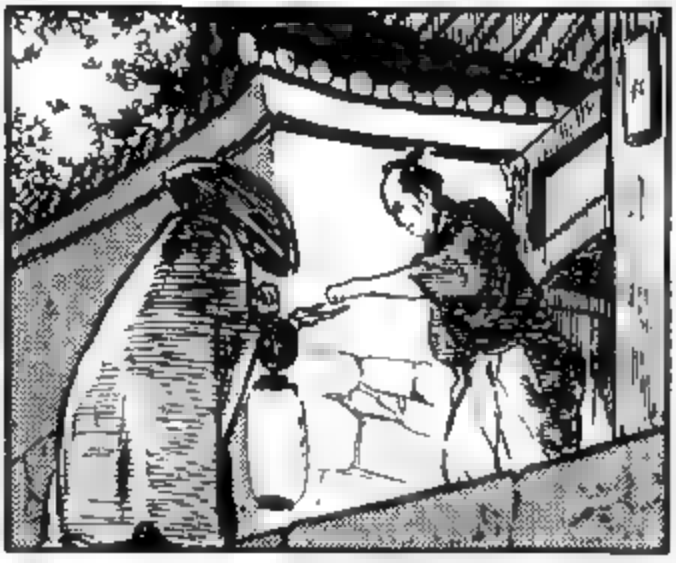


....
CHINNG
CHINNG
CHRNNG
CHRNNG
CHRNNG
CHINNG
CHINNG
CHING
CHANG
JUST A KANNEN-BUTSU MONK.

CHNNNG
CHRNNG
CHRNNG
CHNNG
CHNNG
CHNNG
CHRNNG
CHNNG
CHRNNG
CHNNG
THE ONLY WAY TO INFILTRATE THIS HOUSEHOLD IS TO DIVERT THEM WITH A CHIME.
CHNNG
CHNNG

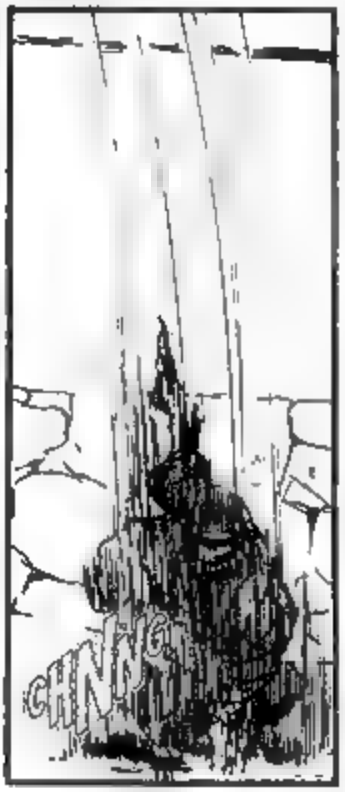
CHINNG
CHINNG
CHIRNNG
CHINNG
CHIRNNG
CHINNG
CHINNG
CHINNG
CHINNG



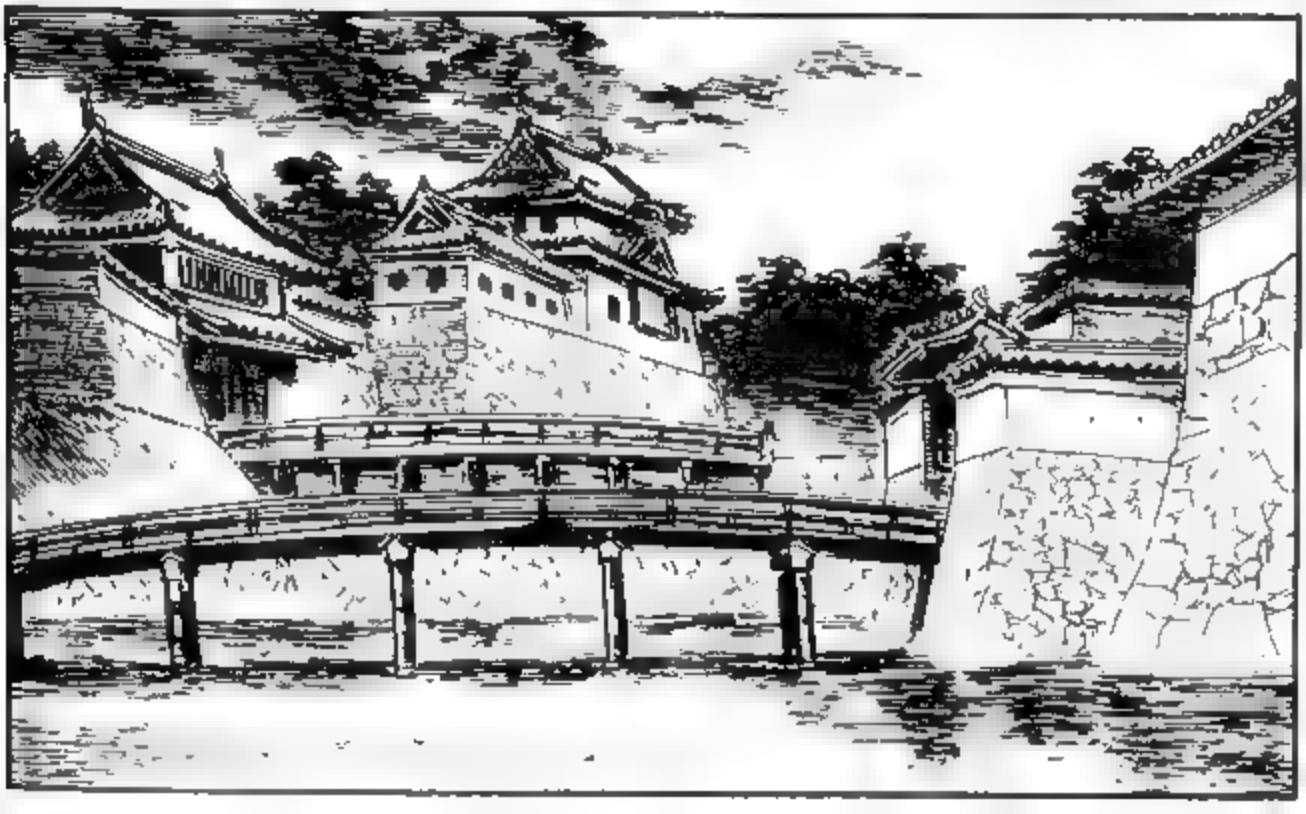


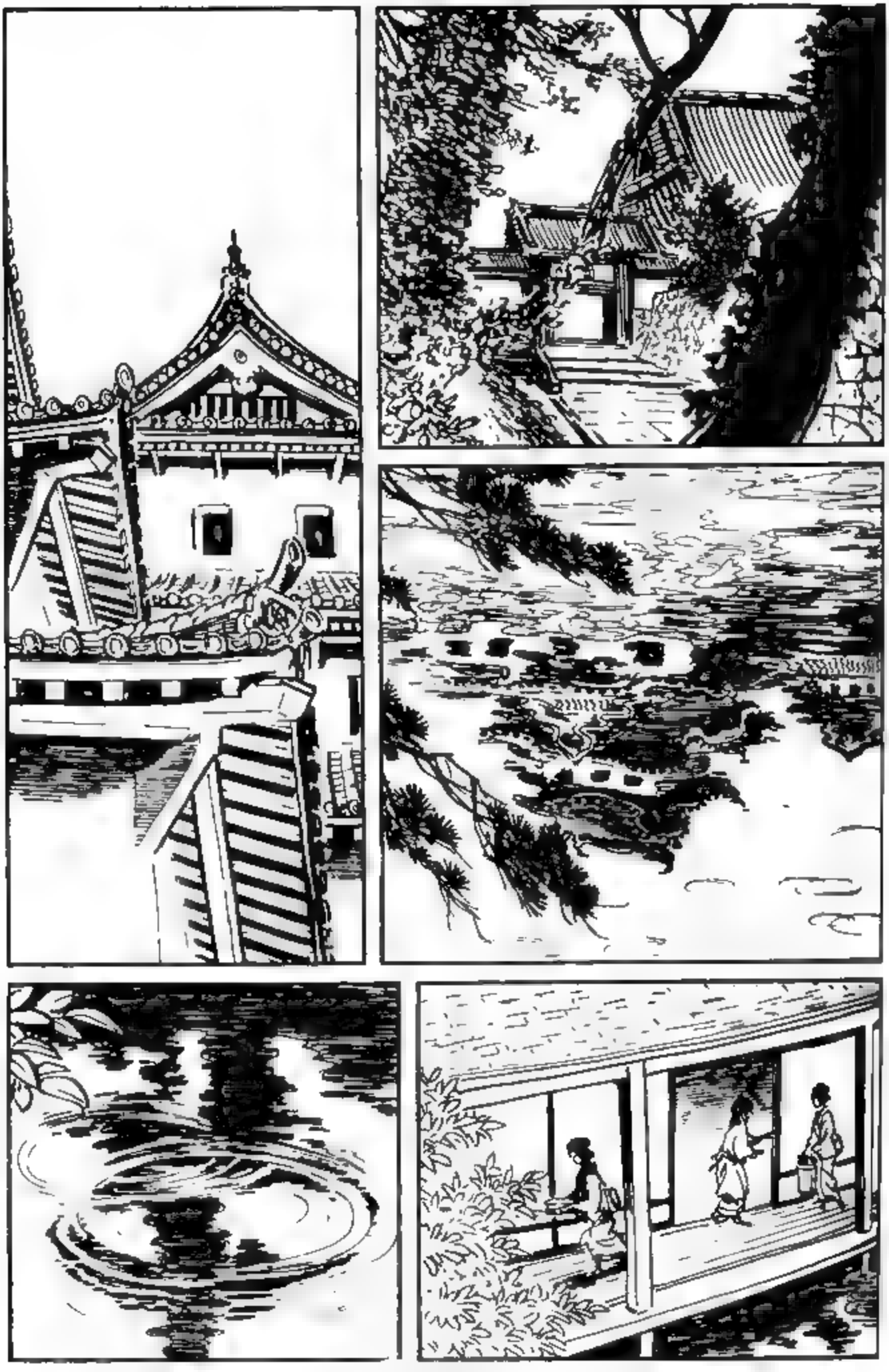
CHNNG
CHRNNG

CHNNG
CHRNNG

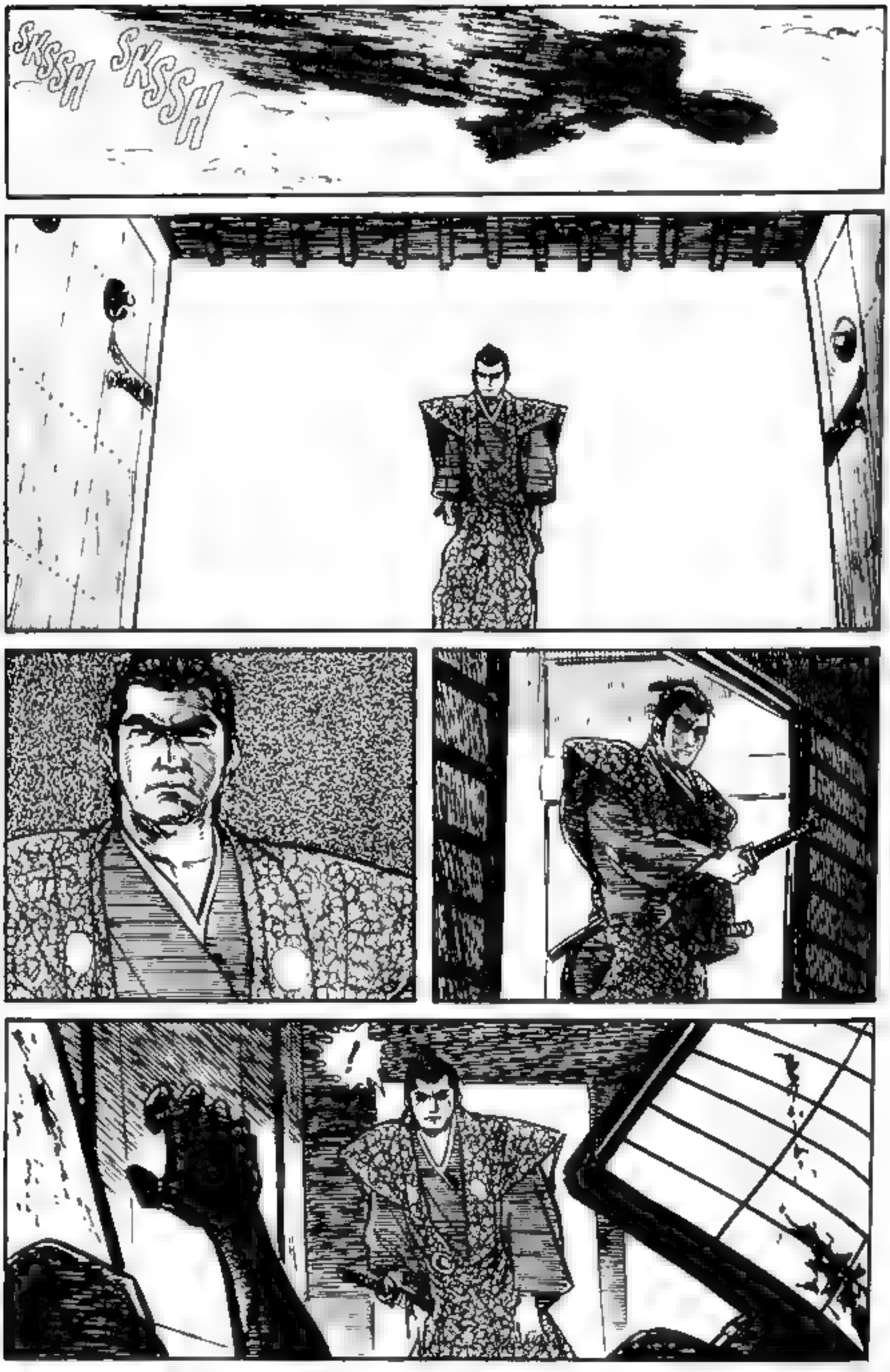

CHNNG

CHNNG
CHRNNG





AAUGH!
UNGGH..
NNNGGAHH..

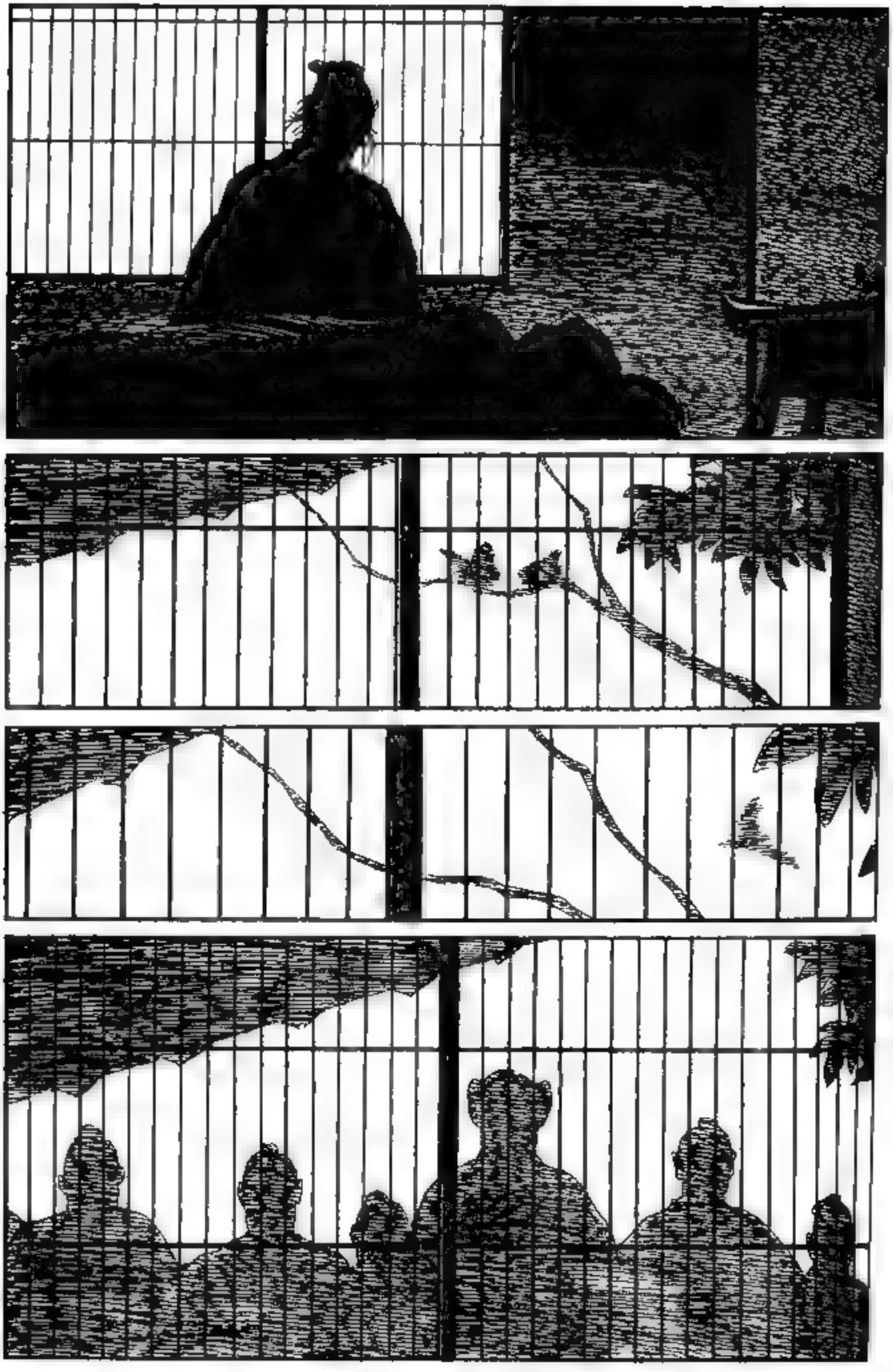

SKSSH SKSSH
!

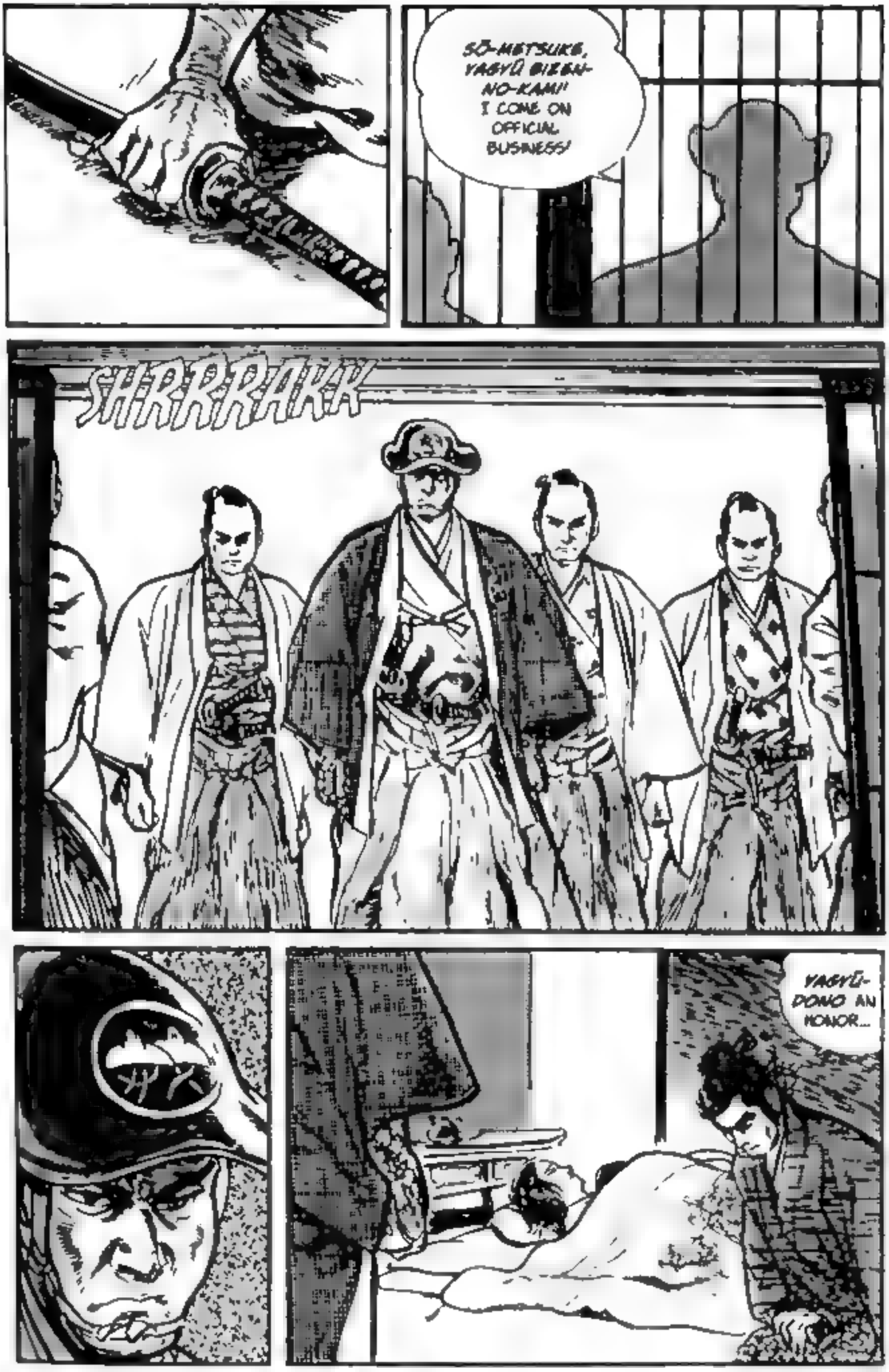
NO!
THD THD THD

NO!!
AZAMI!!
AZA..
AH?!
HRNG!!
HGYAH
HGYAH
UNGYUH
GYAHH!

IT'S DAIGORO..
OUR SON! DAIGORO!
NNNG!
KRRK..

WHO ARE YOU..
WHO DID THIS!?
I WILL NEVER FORGIVE! I WILL AVENGE HER, IF I MUST PART THE GRASSES TO THEIR ROOTS, IF I SEARCH THE ENDS OF THE EARTH!



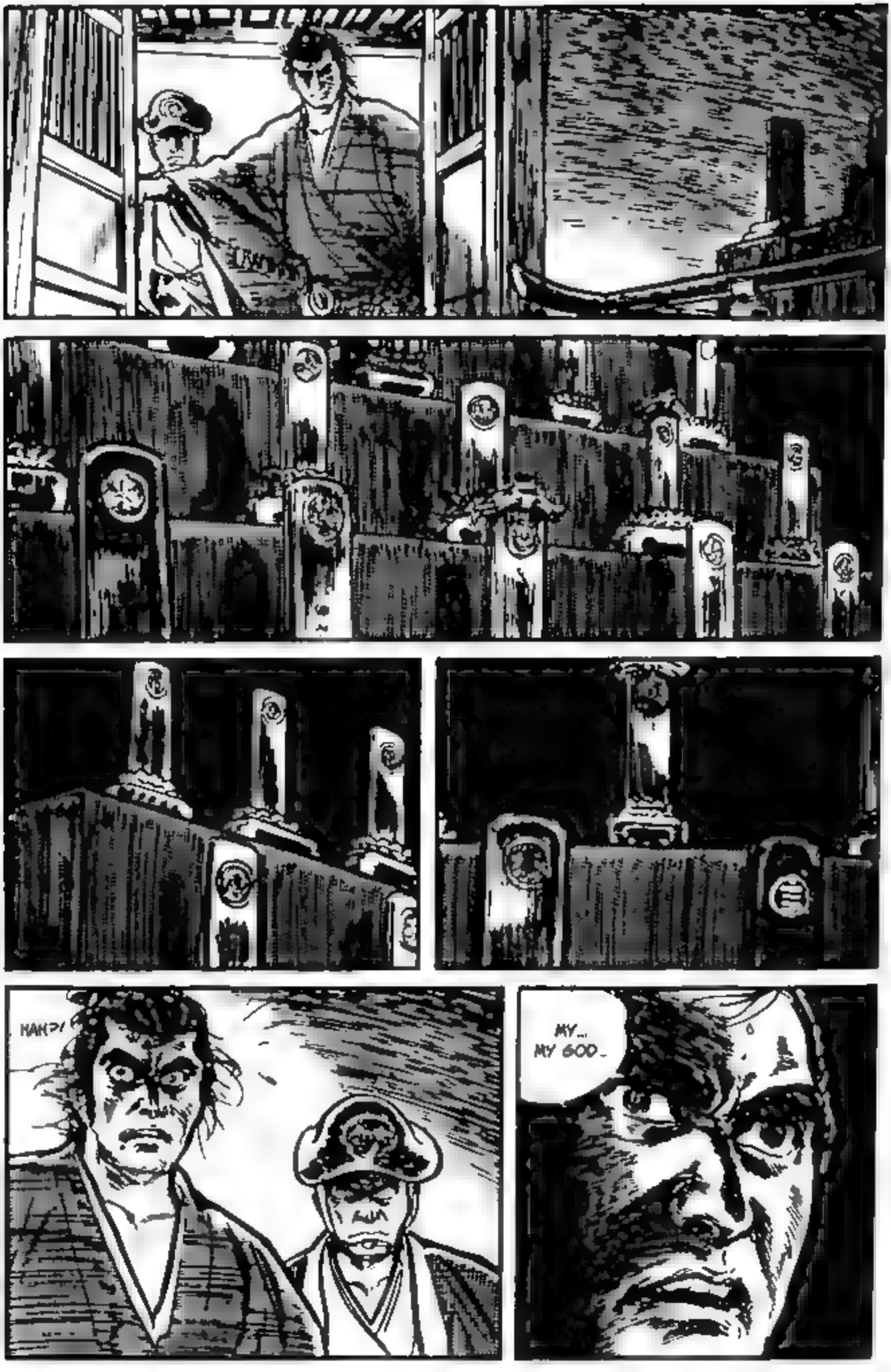

SŌ-METSUKE, YAGYŪ BIZEN-NO-KAMI! I COME ON OFFICIAL BUSINESS!
SHRRRAKK
YAGYŪ-DONO AN HONOR...

TRAGIC...
. . . .
. . . .
THIS MORNING THREE MEN COMMITTED *SEPPUKU* AT THE GATES OF THE *YAGYŪ* CLAN.
I AM HERE BECAUSE OF THE *ZANKANJŌ* CONFESSION THEY LEFT BEHIND.
A *ZANKANJŌ*? TO WHAT...?
"TO AVENGE OUR LORD *HIROTADA* AND PLACATE HIS DEPARTED SOUL, WE THE UNDERSIGNED DO SEEK TO DESTROY UTTERLY THE *ŌGAMI* FAMILY, THE CLAN OF THE SHŌGUNATE'S EXECUTIONER.
"KNOWING THAT IT WAS AN ACT OF GOVERNANCE TO SANCTION OUR LORD'S CLAN, WE DO NOT PRESUME TO TURN OUR VENGEANCE UPON OUR LORD THE *SHŌGUN*. BUT WE DO WISH DEATH UPON *ŌGAMI ITTŌ*, HE WHO WIELDED THE SWORD THAT BEHEADED OUR LORD."

...!
"THOUGH HE SERVE IN THE HIGH POST OF KŌGI KAISHAKUNIN, ŌGAMI ITTŌ HAS ABUSED HIS AUTHORITY FOR PERSONAL GAIN LIKE A PARASITE GNAWING THE LION FROM WITHIN, HE IS A SCOUNDREL WHO DAILY CURSES OUR LORD THE SHŌGUN AND PLOTS HIS OVERTHROW AND BETRAYAL."
. . . .
. . . .
"KNOW YOU THAT THE PROOF IS TO BE FOUND IN THE ŌGAMI FAMILY TEMPLE. DEPRIVED OF OUR LORD AND MASTER, ACCUSED IN THE NAME OF THE SHŌGUN OF TREASON, AND LAMENTING OUR LORD'S UNTIMELY DEMISE...
WE HEREBY PUNISH THE PERFIDIOUS ŌGAMI CLAN, AND FOLLOW OUR LORD IN DEATH BY SEPPUKU."
ODAI HYŌGO, SANSHŪ-IKOMA HAN HANSHI. SIGNED IN BLOOD!
ATOBE SHICHINOSUKE, SIGNED IN BLOOD! MAKISHIMA BORŌZAEMON, SIGNED IN BLOOD!
. . W- WHAT?!

THREE SAMURAI HAVE SIGNED THIS CONFESSION WITH THEIR LIVES.
IN MY CAPACITY AS SŌ-METSUKE, I MUST INSPECT YOUR FAMILY TEMPLE. LORD OGAMI, LEAD US THERE!
WHAT IS THIS?
YOU BELIEVE THE WORDS OF THESE MEN WHO SLAUGHTERED MY FAMILY, MEN WHO DESERVE TO BE DRAWN AND QUARTERED FOR THEIR CRIME?!
YOU WOULD SEARCH THE FAMILY TEMPLE OF THE KŌGI KAISHAKUNIN HIMSELF?!
THAT IS NOT WHAT I SAID!
I SAY ONLY THAT IF WE DO NOT MOVE QUICKLY TO CLOSE THIS AFFAIR, IT WILL DAMAGE THE AUTHORITY OF THE SHŌGUNATE.
IT IS MY NATURAL DUTY AS INSPECTOR GENERAL!
. . . .
. . . .
WE MUST DEMONSTRATE THAT THIS ZANKANJŌ IS GROUNDLESS, AND PUT AN IMMEDIATE STOP TO ANY RUMORS ABOUT THE SHŌGUNATE. WE SHALL ANNOUNCE THAT YOUR HONORED WIFE AND RETAINERS WERE FELLED BY ILLNESS.
PLEASE UNDERSTAND THAT WE HAVE RUSHED HERE THIS MORNING TO HELP YOU IN YOUR ADVERSITY!
. . . .
. . . .

IT IS ESSENTIAL THAT WE AVOID ANY STAIN ON THE REPUTATION OF THE KŌGI KAISHAKUNIN AND THE ŌGAMI CLAN!
WELL?!
THIS IS THE TEMPLE WHERE I PRAY FOR THE SALVATION OF THOSE DAIMYŌ I HAVE EXECUTED IN THE NAME OF THE SHŌGUN.
MOST LAUDABLE, LORD ŌGAMI. I AM IMPRESSED.


HAH?!
MY...
MY GOD...

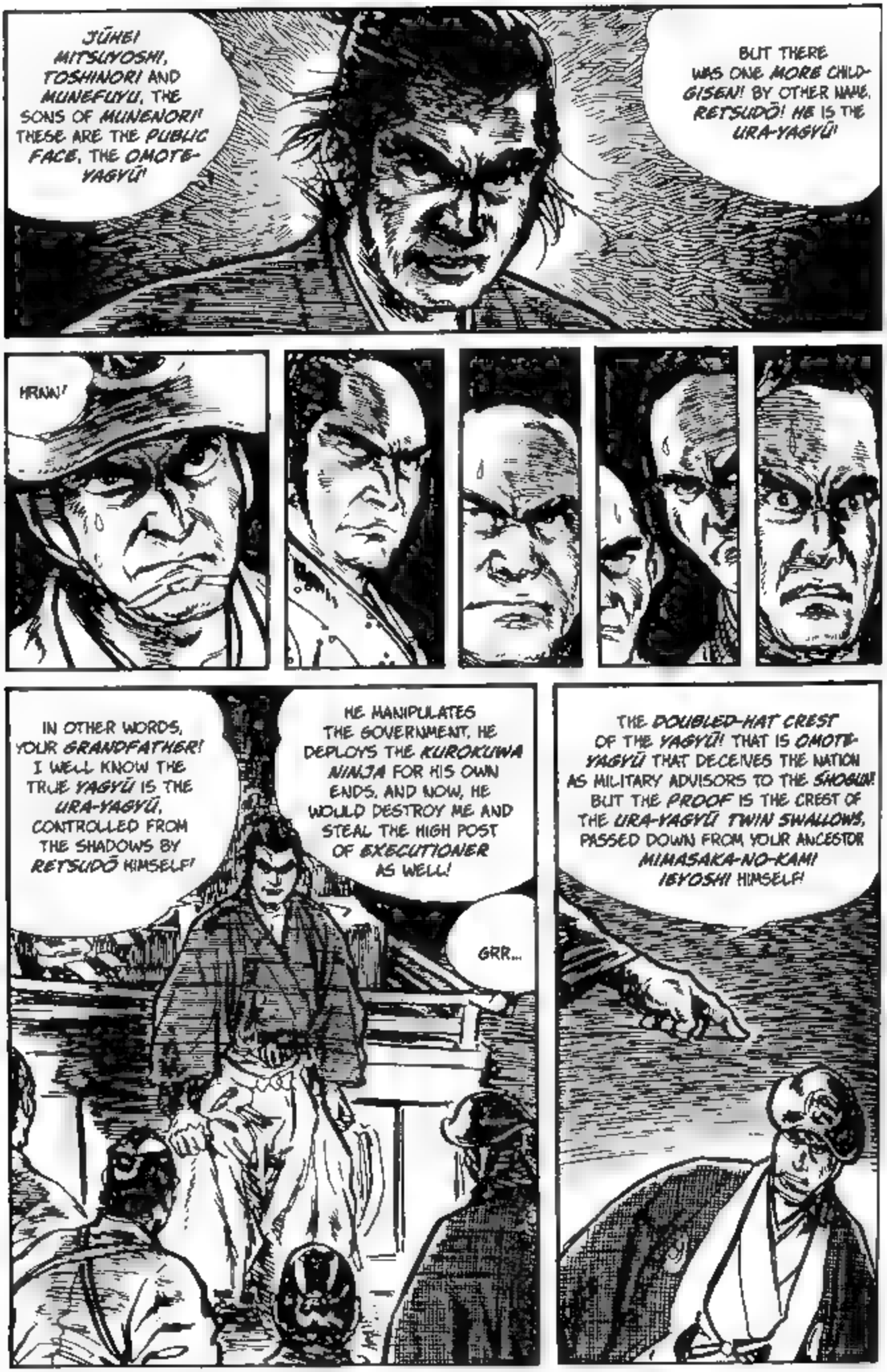
RHAW!
WHAT IS THIS?!
AN INAW TO
THE SHŌGUN'S
CREST?!
....
....

LORD ŌGAKI!
WHAT IS
THIS INAW?!
HOW DARE
YOU HAVE AN INAW
TO THE FAMILY
OF THE SHŌGUN
HIMSELF!
KRRK !

DISGRACEFUL!
YOU STILL MAKE
EXCUSES?! AS SO-
COME WITH US!

SEIZE HIM! ARREST LORD ŌGAMI!
IS NOT THIS STRANGE? WHAT PREPARATIONS ARE THESE, LORD YAGYŪ?! YOU COME EQUIPPED TO TAKE ME BY FORCE?!
HRN...! IT IS ONLY PRUDENT TO PREPARE FOR THE WORST!
THEN YOU WOULD COME FULLY ARMED FROM THE START! WHY CONCEAL IT BENEATH HAORI?!
AND MORE.

WHAT?!
IF YOU YAGYŪ ARE BEHIND THIS..
EVERYTHING MAKES SENSE!
ARE YOU MAD, ŌGAMI ITTŌ?
WHY WOULD THE HANSHI OF IKOMA HAN CUT THEIR STOMACHS FOR SOMETHING I CAN'T EVEN REMEMBER?!
BUT IF YOU ARRANGED IT ALL TO BRING ME DOWN, THEN IT FITS TOGETHER. ONLY TOO WELL!
I KNOW THE URA-YAGYŪ HUNGERS FOR THE POST OF KŌGI KAISHAKUNIN
THAT'S WHAT'S BEHIND IT!
REALLY?! AND WHAT IS THIS URA-YAGYŪ OF WHICH YOU SPEAK? YOU TALK AS THOUGH OUR YAGYŪ CLAN HAS TWO FACES..
DON'T ACT STUPID!!


JŪHEI MITSUYOSHI, TOSHINORI AND MUNEFUYU, THE SONS OF MUNENORI! THESE ARE THE PUBLIC FACE, THE OMOTE-YAGYŪ!
BUT THERE WAS ONE MORE CHILD-GISEN! BY OTHER NAME, RETSUDŌ! HE IS THE URA-YAGYŪ!
HRAH!
IN OTHER WORDS, YOUR GRANDFATHER! I WELL KNOW THE TRUE YAGYŪ IS THE URA-YAGYŪ, CONTROLLED FROM THE SHADOWS BY RETSUDŌ HIMSELF!
HE MANIPULATES THE GOVERNMENT, HE DEPLOYS THE KUROKUWA NINJA FOR HIS OWN ENDS. AND NOW, HE WOULD DESTROY ME AND STEAL THE HIGH POST OF EXECUTIONER AS WELL!
GRR...
THE DOUBLED-HAT CREST OF THE YAGYŪ! THAT IS OMOTE-YAGYŪ THAT DECEIVES THE NATION AS MILITARY ADVISORS TO THE SHOGUN! BUT THE PROOF IS THE CREST OF THE URA-YAGYŪ TWIN SWALLOWS, PASSED DOWN FROM YOUR ANCESTOR MIMASAKA-NO-KAMI IEYOSHI HIMSELF!

NOW LIKES YOU, ŌGAMI ITTŌ, YOU'VE DONE YOUR HOMEWORK WELL.
NOW IT SEEMS WE DARENT LEAVE YOU ALIVE. ŌGAMI ITTŌ BATTLES THE IKOMA MAN HANSHI AND PERISHES BENEATH THEIR BLADES! THAT WILL DO PERFECTLY!
NOW I SEE IT! YOU FORCED THE IKOMA MEN TO WRITE THAT CONFESSION AND TAKE THEIR LIVES!
GRRR! IS THERE NOTHING YOU WOULDN'T STOOP TO IN YOUR GREED, YAGYU!?
YOU'LL PAY! I'LL MAKE YOU PAY!!
KILL HIM!

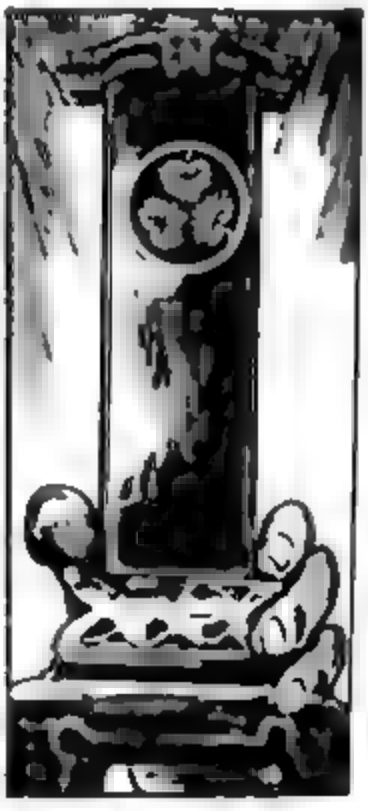
HYAAAH!

BOAHHH!

SHSSS!

CHOOO

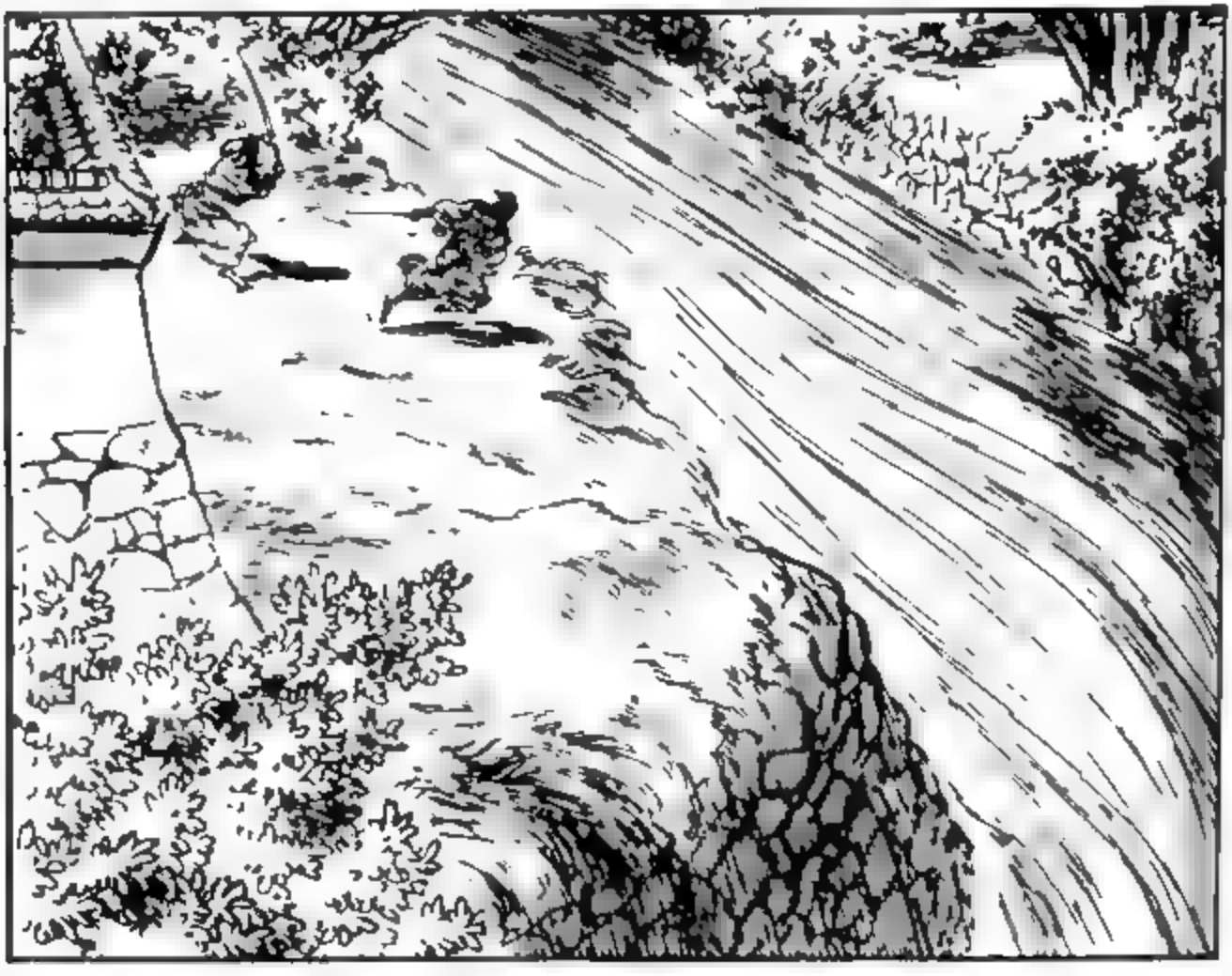
SHOOO

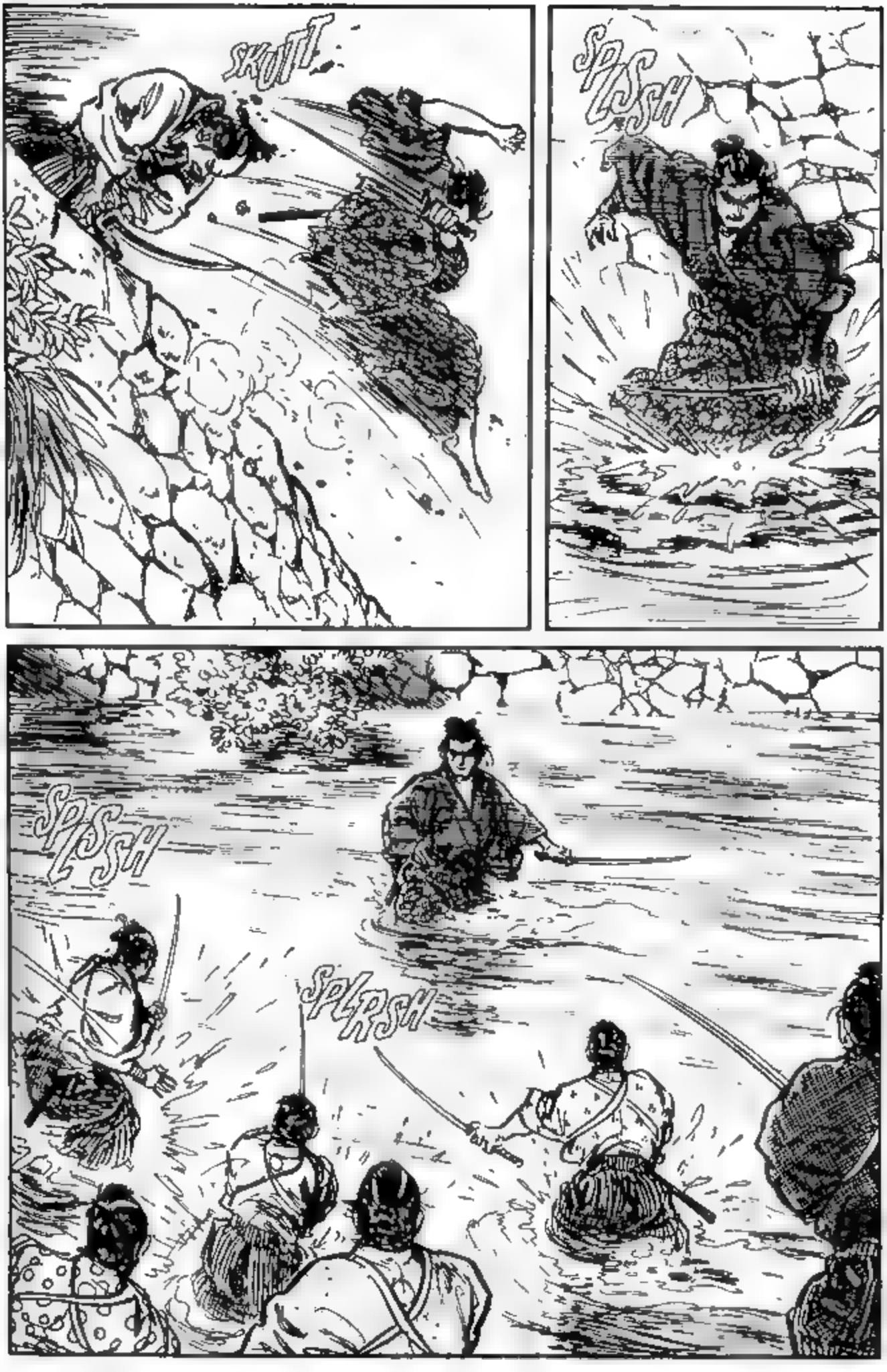


KRAKK
SSCHOKK
HUKK
SSST
SKOSSH

SHRAK

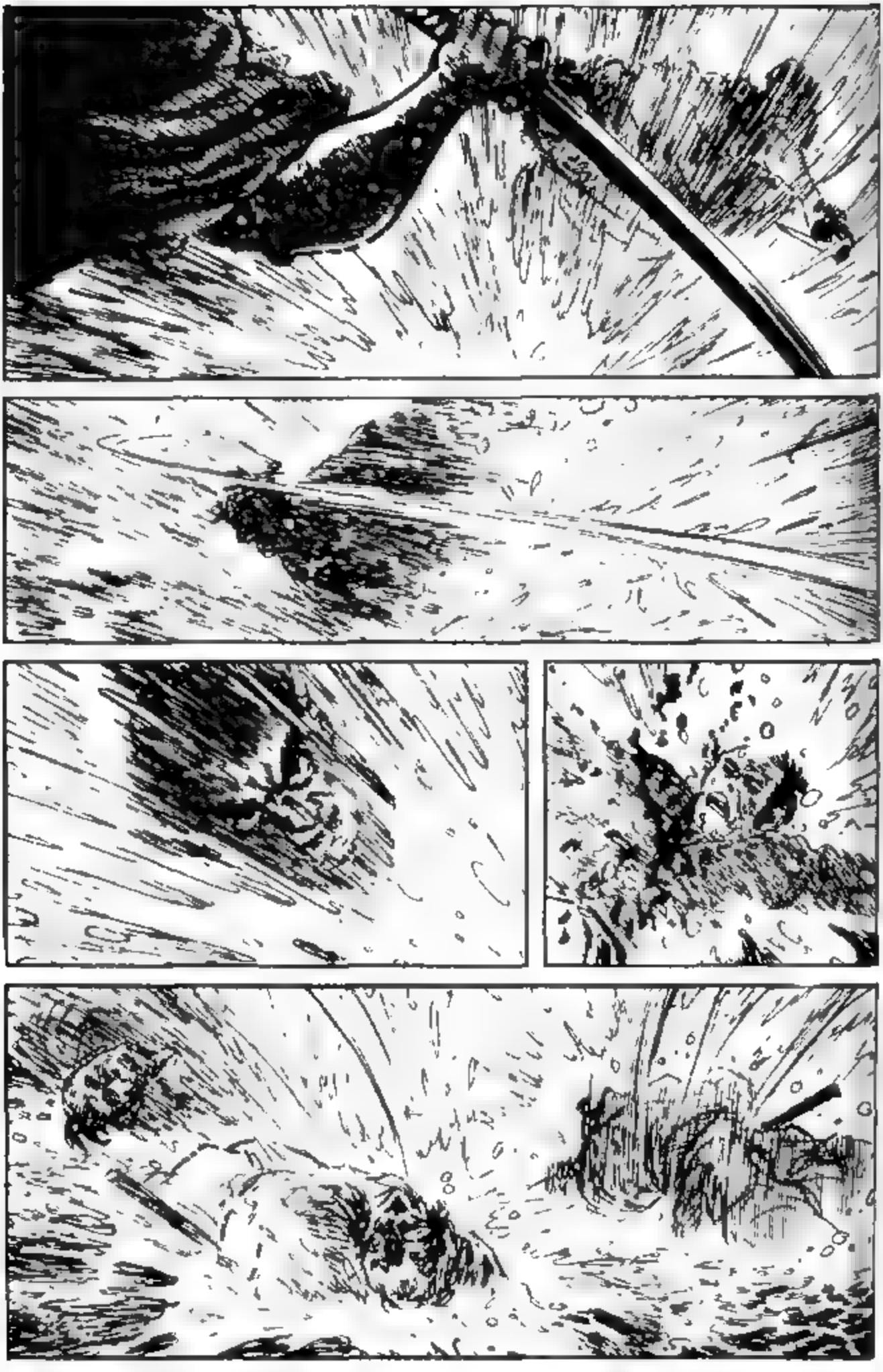
AFTER HIM!
NO ESCAPE!



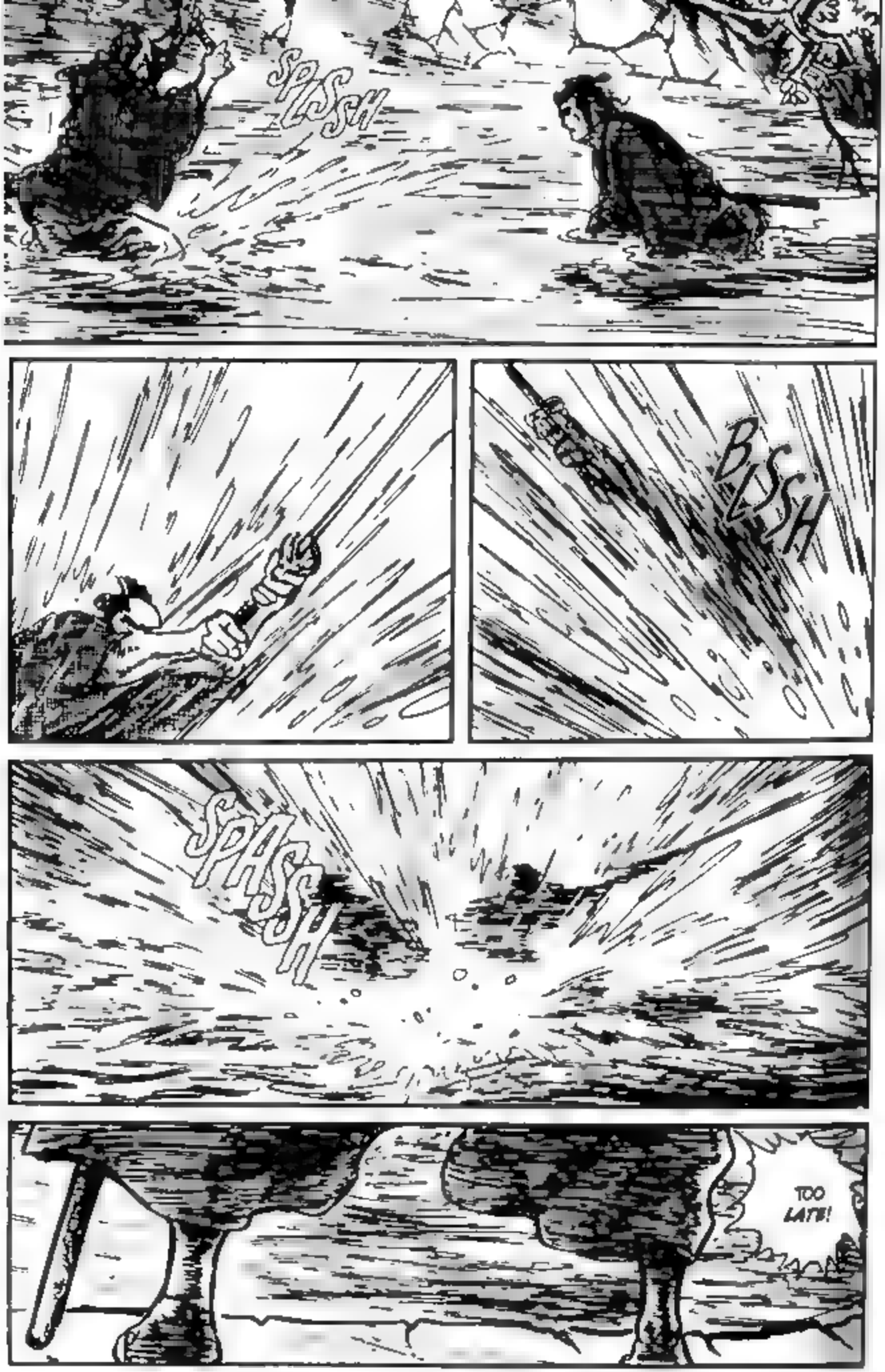

SKUTT
SPLSH
SPLSH
SPLRSH

NO! THE SUIŌ SCHOOL IS BORN TO THE WATER!

BIZEN YOU FOOL!"



NOT THAT!
THE SUIHO WAVE-SLICING STROKE!


SPLSH
BLSSH
SPHSH
TOO LATE!

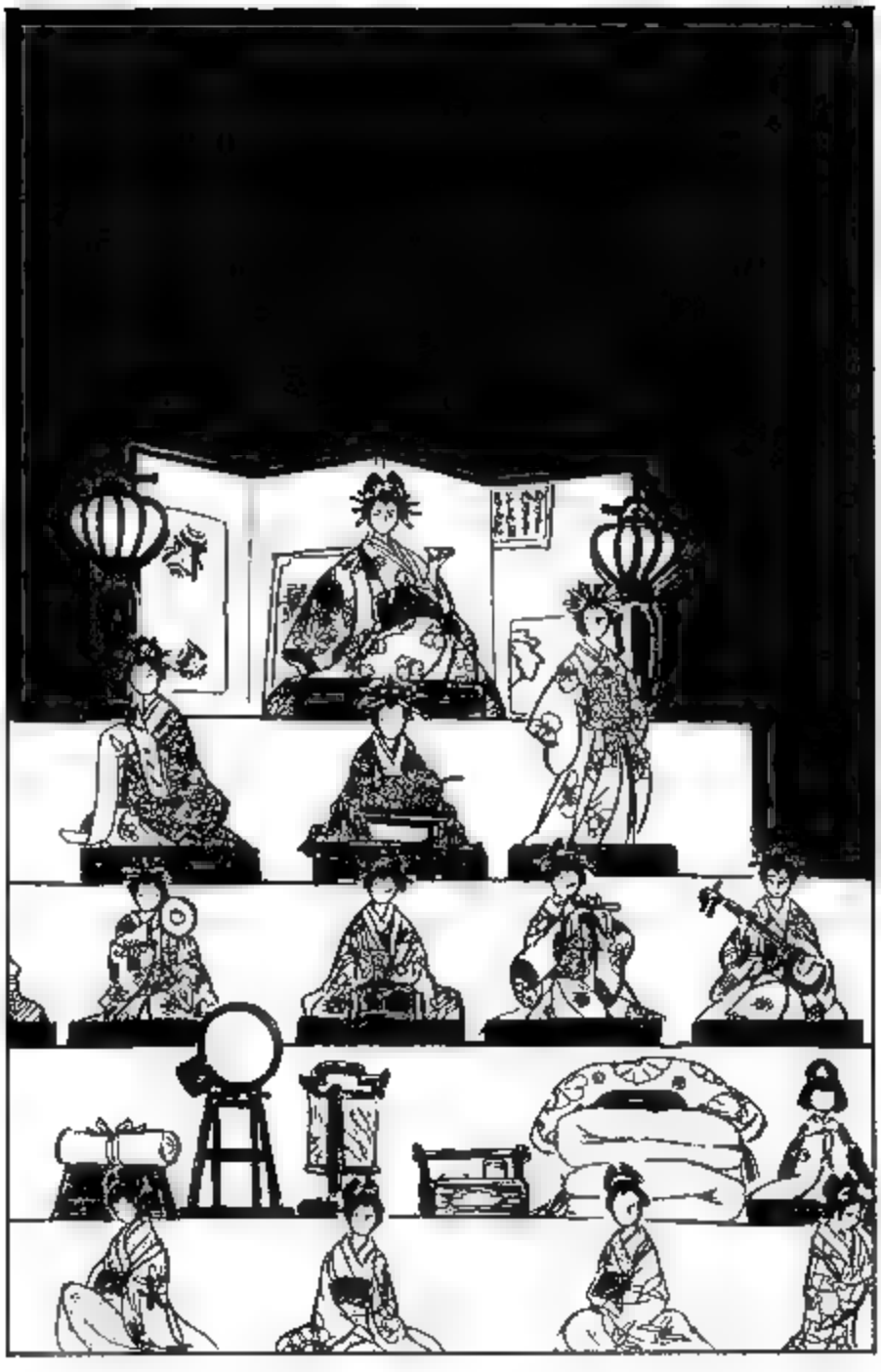
IDIOT! NEVER TAKE THE HIGH GUARD STANCE IN THE WATER! YOUR FORWARD LUNGE IS USELESS!
THE SUBMERGED SUIŌ BLADE NARROWS THE GAP BETWEEN YOU. STROKING UP FROM THE WAVES! YOU WILL ALWAYS STRIKE TOO LATE, BIZEN!

RITSUDŌ OF THE UKA YAGYŪ!!

YOU USE EVERY TREACHERY TO SEIZE MORE POWER! I WILL NOT PERMIT IT!
I WILL CRUSH YOU WITH THE HATRED OF THE ŌGAMI CLAN, YAGYŪ!
ŌGAMI ITTŌ! THE SHŌGUNATE IS THE YAGYŪ, THE YAGYŪ IS THE SHŌGUNATE! FORGET IT NOT!
STRUGGLE ALL YOU MAY! YOUR DESTINY IS DECIDED!
FIGHT ME, YAGYŪ!
YOUR SUIŌ SCHOOL IS CHILD'S PLAY TO ME, ŌGAMI! BUT WITH BIZEN DEAD, THERE CAN BE NO VICTORY HERE.
THE WORK OF THE OMOTE-YAGYŪ SHALL BE DONE LEGITIMATELY! BY DECREE OF THE SHŌGUN!
COME BACK!!
WASH YOUR NECK AND WAIT.

YOU'LL PAY... I SWEAR I'LL MAKE YOU PAY!
THIS HATRED. MY HATRED!!
THE RIVER OF WATER, THE OMOTE-YAGYŪ
THE RIVER OF FIRE, THE URA-YAGYŪ!
USE ALL YOUR PLOTS AND TRICKERY AGAINST ME! I WILL STAY THE WHITE WAY, THOUGH I BE A CORPSE, THOUGH I BE BUT BURNED BONES! I SHALL HAVE VENGEANCE...
...YAGYŪ!

the eighteenth



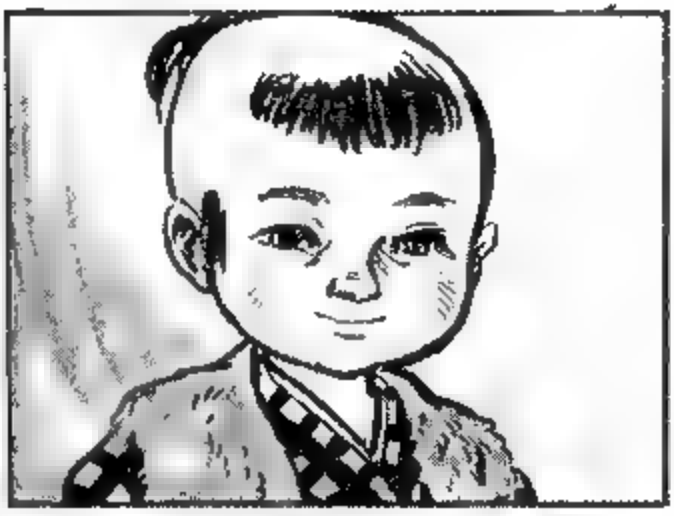
The Virgin and the Whore

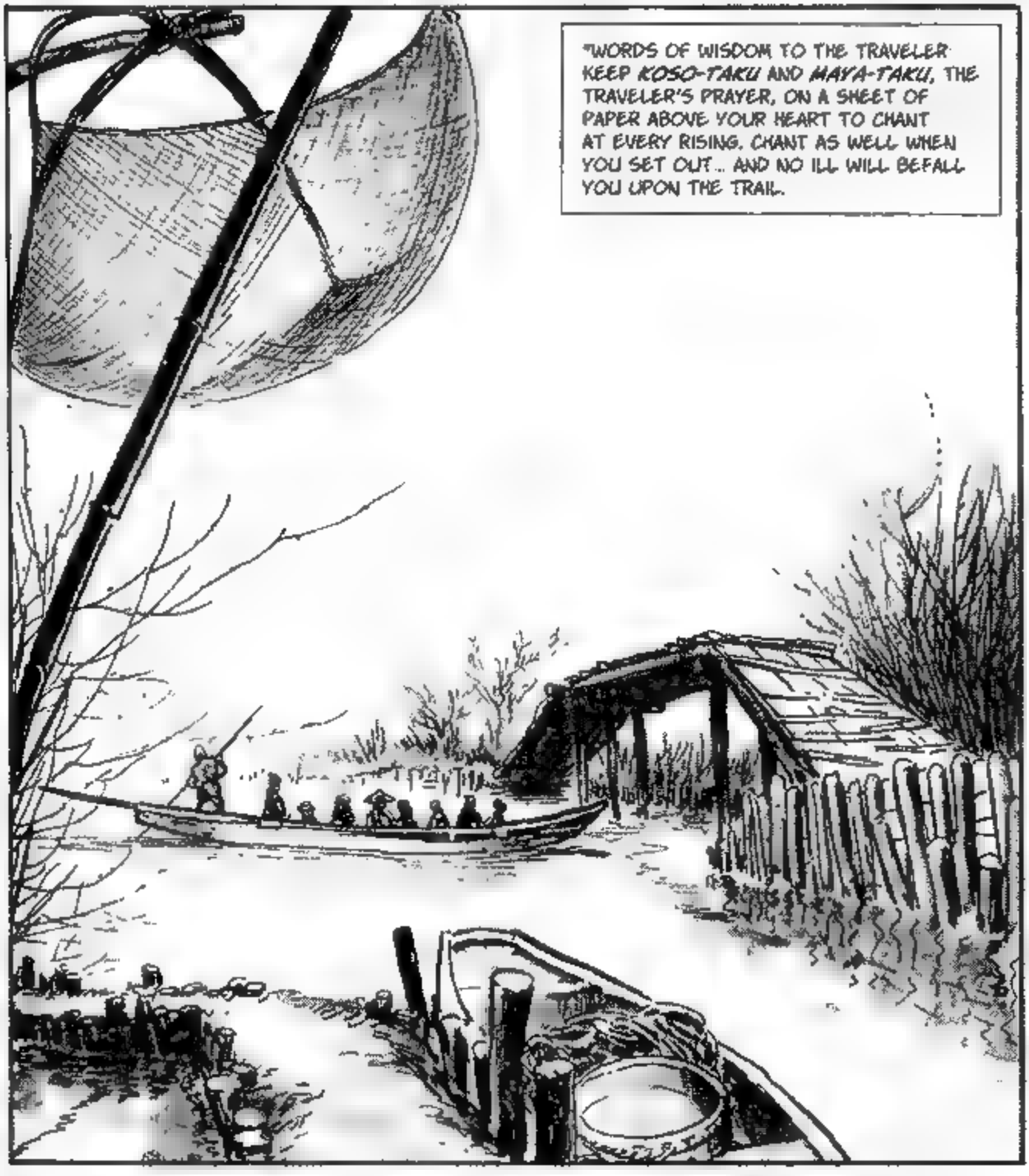
KATORI, KAJIMA-MAWARI
ON THE UTSUNOMIYA TRAIL
NEAR ITAKO-JUKU.

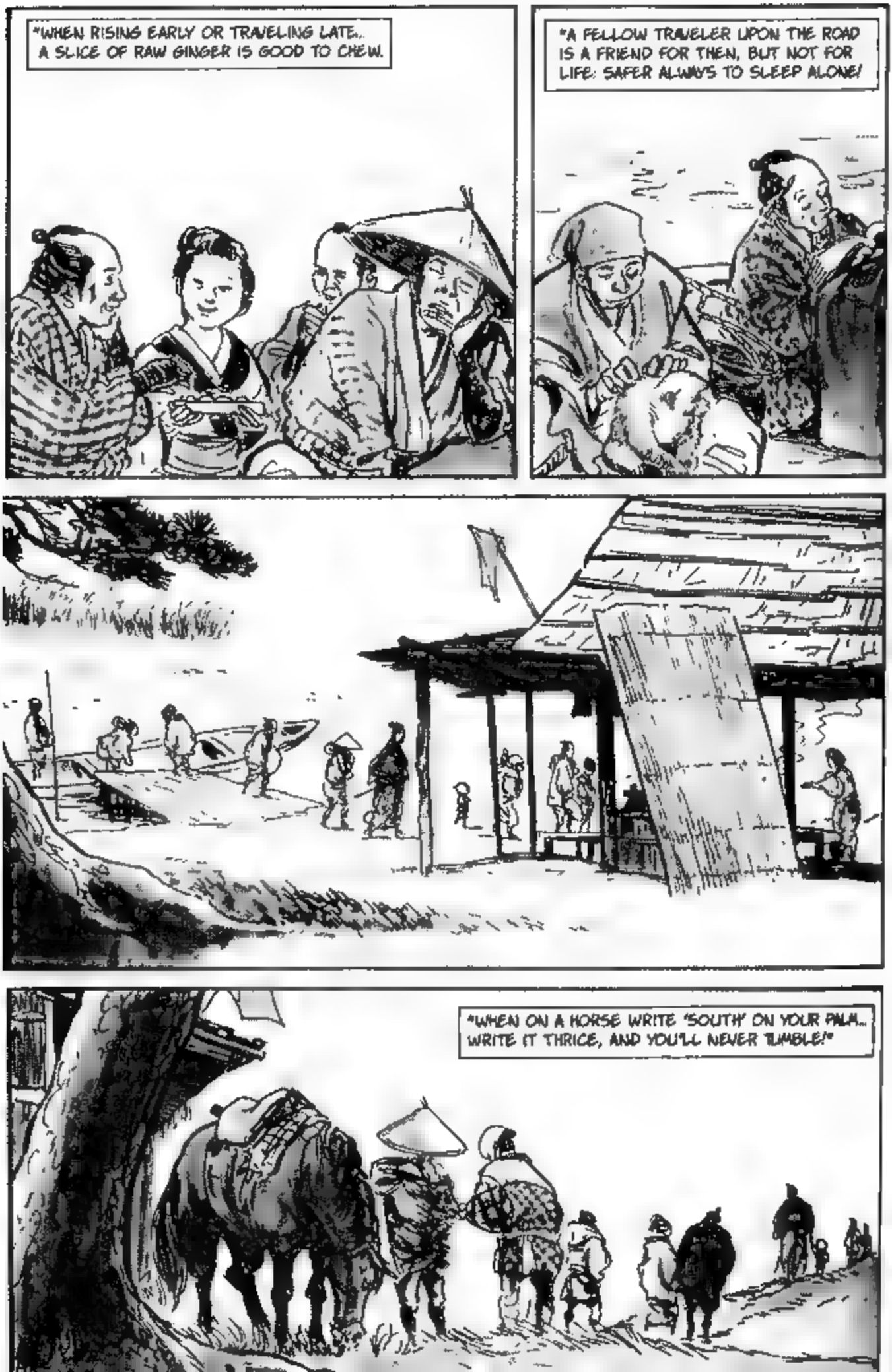
KRIK
KRIK
KRIK
KRIK

KRIK
AH!
OHH!

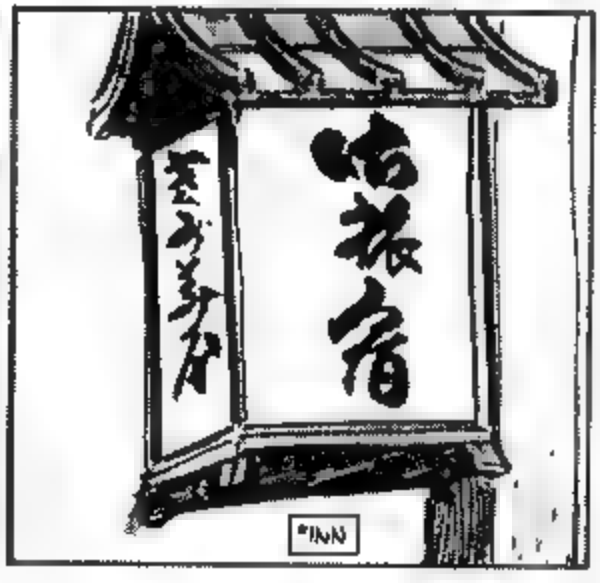
HEY, HEY. IT'S NOTHING VALUABLE. FORGET IT.
BUT! BUT I...!
HEY, KID. WE DROPPED THAT. GIVE IT BACK, OKAY?
OH, THANK YOU!
THANK YOU...!




"WORDS OF WISDOM TO THE TRAVELER: KEEP KOSO-TAKU AND MAYA-TAKU, THE TRAVELER'S PRAYER, ON A SHEET OF PAPER ABOVE YOUR HEART TO CHANT AT EVERY RISING. CHANT AS WELL WHEN YOU SET OUT... AND NO ILL WILL BEFALL YOU UPON THE TRAIL.


"WHEN RISING EARLY OR TRAVELING LATE..
A SLICE OF RAW GINGER IS GOOD TO CHEW.
"A FELLOW TRAVELER UPON THE ROAD IS A FRIEND FOR THEN, BUT NOT FOR LIFE: SAFER ALWAYS TO SLEEP ALONE!
"WHEN ON A HORSE WRITE 'SOUTH' ON YOUR PALM... WRITE IT THRICE, AND YOU'LL NEVER TUMBLE!"

宿

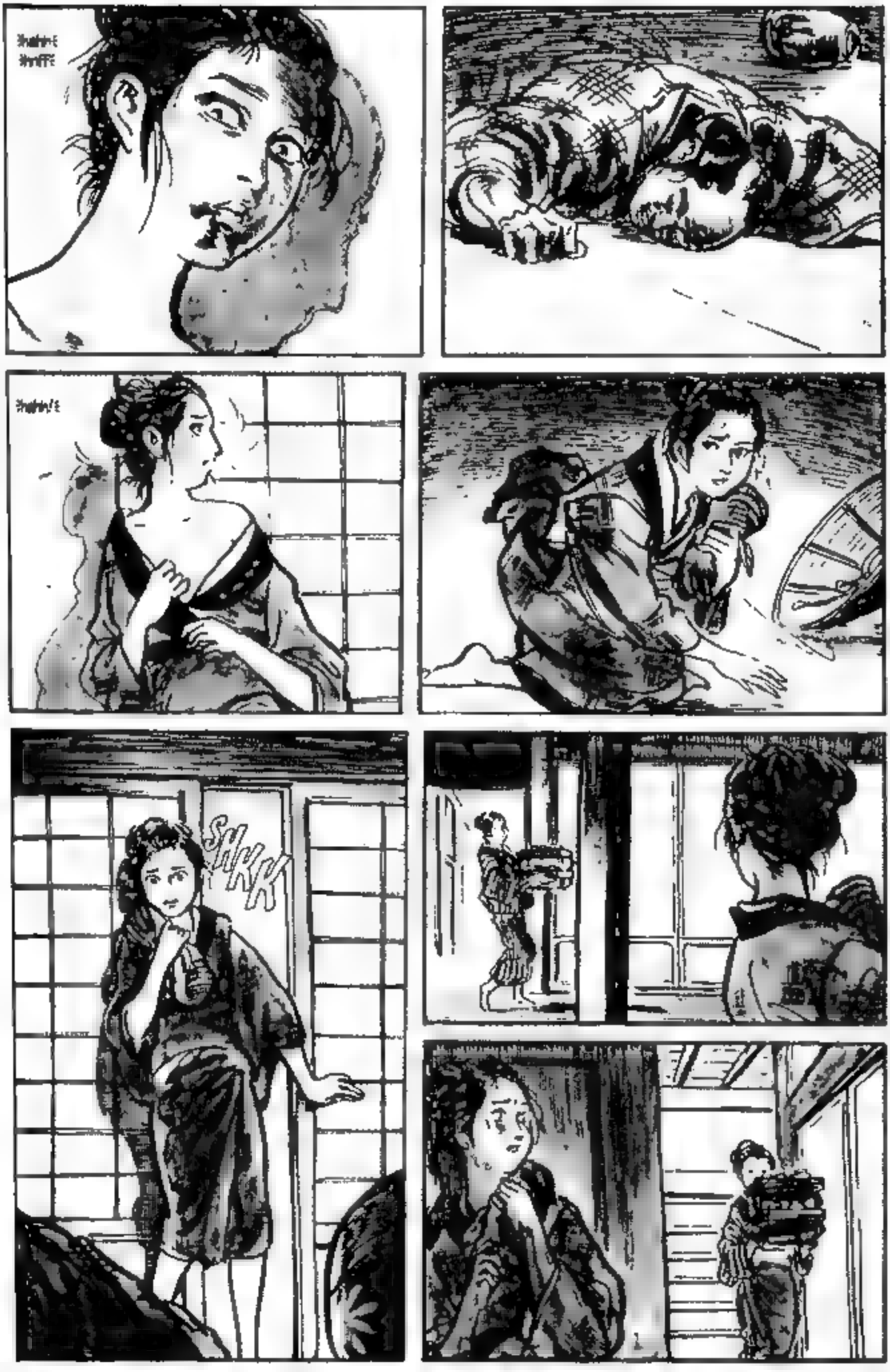

旅宿
*INN

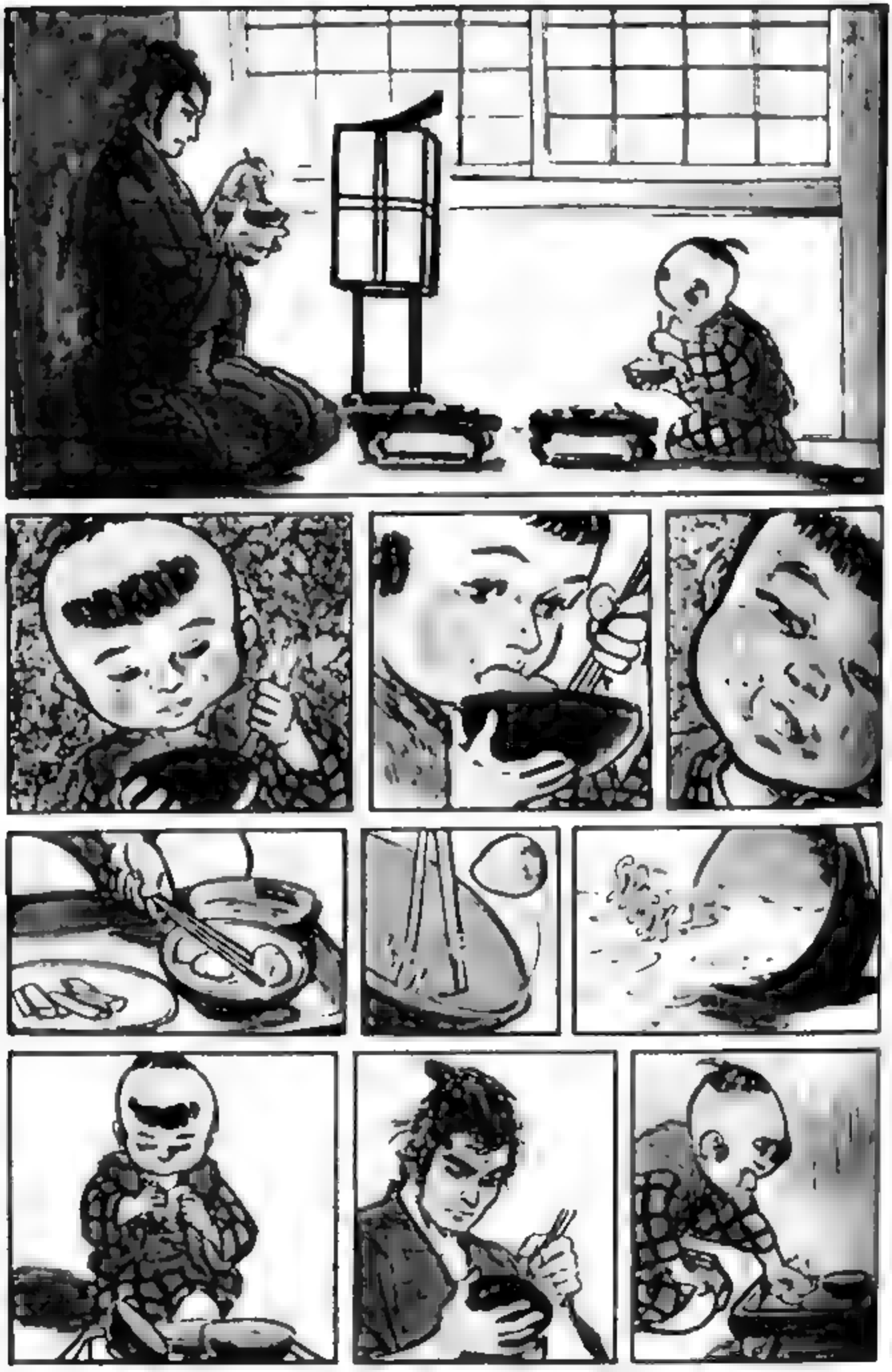
"WHEN FEET GROW TIRED RUB SALT ON YOUR SOLES AND HOLD THEM CLOSE TO A FIRE. REPEAT AFTER BATHS WITH SALT OR SOY SAUCE. EVEN SESAME OIL AS NEEDED"

THAT SHOULD DO IT.
NOW HOLD THEM CLOSE TO THE FIRE.
HUPP!
OH!
GULP
HAVEN'T HAD A VIRGIN FOR A LONG TIME...

AH! NO.
HEH. IT'S DUMB TO WASTE A HOT PROPERTY, BUT EVEN ZIGGIN ARE HUMAN!
SOMETIMES A GUY WANTS A VIRGIN FOR HIMSELF! HEH HEH HEH
NO!
UNTIL I SELL YOU TO THE WHOREHOUSE, YOU'RE MY PROPERTY, RIGHT?!
AAH!
NO! STOP IT! DON'T!

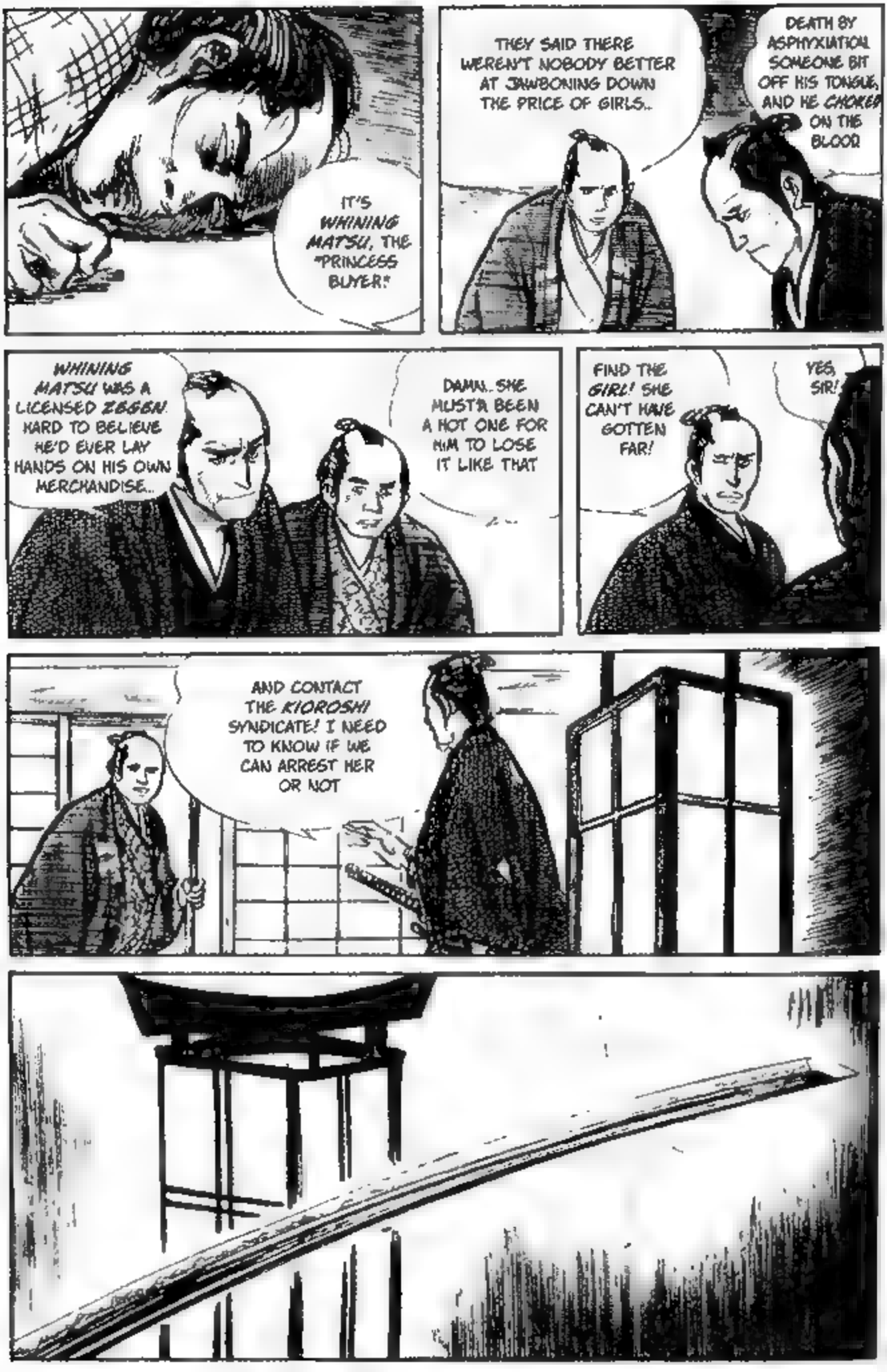
YAA!
UNGH!!
CHKK
UGGLHH
GLRK!
AHHGLHH

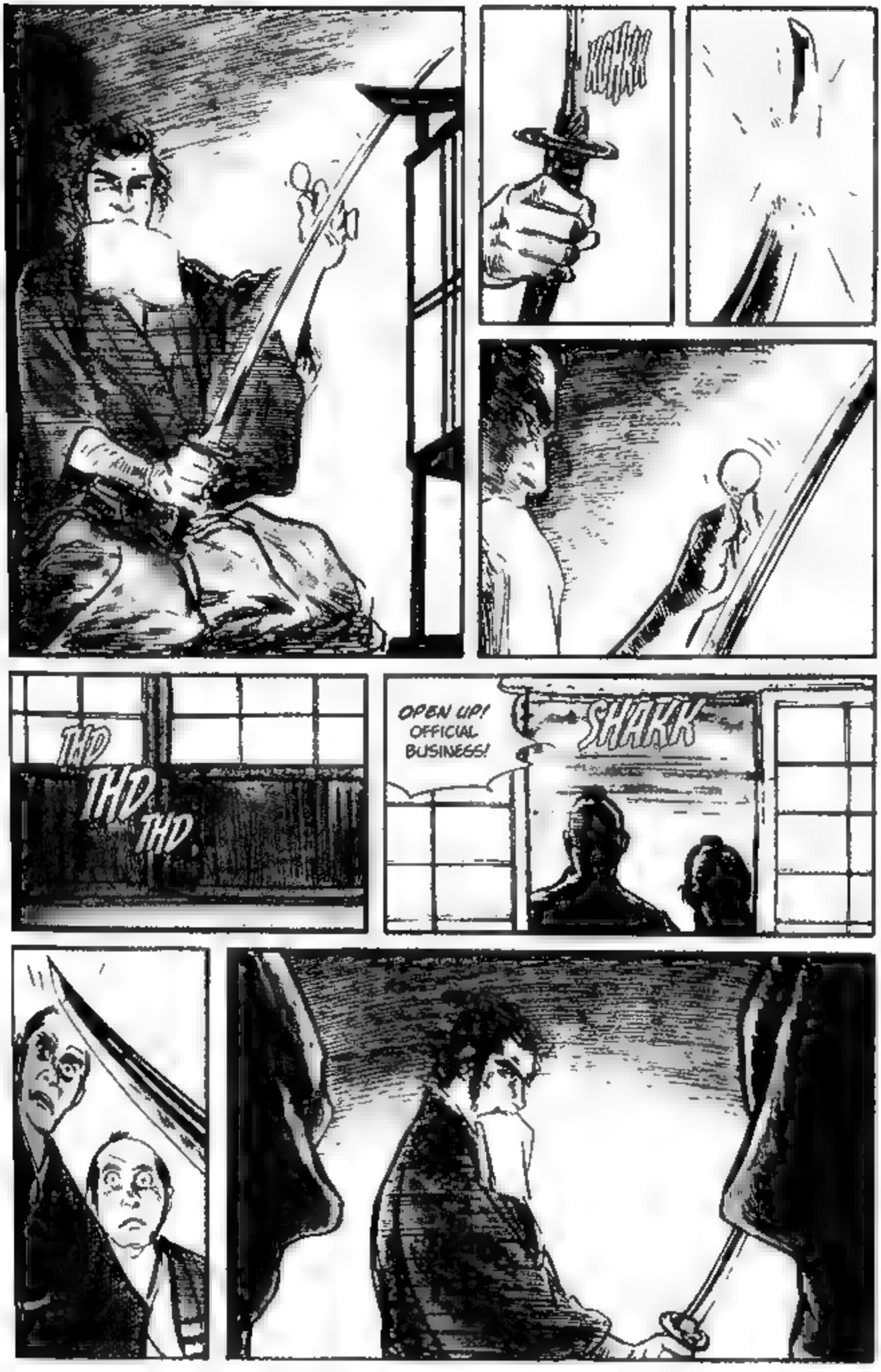

SHKK



EEEEEK!!
SHRRAKK
KRASSH
KTAK
AWAY
HELP!!
SOMEBODY!
HELP!
THD
THD
KTHD
AWD
THD

shshhk
shshhk
AAAHHHNN!
OHH
NO-OHH...
NNGK..
HUHH
SIS
BLOOD!


IT'S WHINING MATSU, THE "PRINCESS BUYER!"
THEY SAID THERE WEREN'T NOBODY BETTER AT JAWBONING DOWN THE PRICE OF GIRLS..
DEATH BY ASPHYXIATION! SOMEONE BIT OFF HIS TONGUE, AND HE CHOKED ON THE BLOOD
WHINING MATSU WAS A LICENSED ZEGEN! HARD TO BELIEVE HE'D EVER LAY HANDS ON HIS OWN MERCHANDISE..
DAMN.. SHE MUST'A BEEN A HOT ONE FOR HIM TO LOSE IT LIKE THAT
FIND THE GIRL! SHE CAN'T HAVE GOTTEN FAR!
YES, SIR!
AND CONTACT THE KIOROSHI SYNDICATE! I NEED TO KNOW IF WE CAN ARREST HER OR NOT


KICHAK
THD
THD
THD
OPEN UP! OFFICIAL BUSINESS!
SHAKK

S-SORRY TO INTRUDE, BUT.
THERE'S BEEN A MURDER WE'RE HUNTING FOR THE GIRL WHO DID IT. DID SHE--
NO!
PERHAPS..
WE'D BETTER SEARCH ANYWAY
YOU! IF SHE ISN'T HERE, THEN WHAT WILL YOU DO?

WE SAID IT WAS OFFICIAL BUSINESS! YOU HAVE SOME COMPLAINT?
ONLY SHELTER ON THE ROAD.
YET ONCE PAID FOR, THIS ONE ROOM IS MY CASTLE, MY ESTATE!
BEFORE A CORRUPT PETTY OFFICIAL BARGES IN, HE SHOULD CONSIDER THE CONSEQUENCES.
THAT'S WHY I ASK!
HRNNG! PRETTY COCKY FOR A MISERABLE RŌNIN!
YOU REFUSE AN OFFICIAL GO-YŌ SEARCH?! YOU OBSTRUCT JUSTICE?!
KAH-CHOO!
AND IF SHE IS HERE, WHAT THEN?
LET'S HEAR YOU ANSWER THAT!
THOSE WHO SHIELD A MURDERER SHARE THE GUILT!
SO YOU DO KNOW THE LAW!
HEH HEH. LET'S HAVE A LOOK.
IF SHE ISN'T HERE, TAKE MY HEAD.
ANY COMPLAINT ABOUT THAT...? HEH HEH..

SHAKK
AH?!
WHAT TH-?!
DISCIPLINE! THE BOY MIS-BEHAVED!
NOW...SHALL I TAKE THAT HEAD?!
YEEK!
GET OUT!!

SHA-TAK
TH. THANK YOU!!
GO NOW. GET TO THE BACK GATE THROUGH THE GARDEN, AND YOU CAN FOLLOW THE MOAT OUT OF TOWN.
WE ALL WALK DIFFERENT PATHS, DAIGORO.. WE HAVE OURS. THIS GIRL MUST FOLLOW HERS.

FORTUNE... MISFORTUNE...THEY CHANGE WITH TIME. A LIFE COMES BUT ONCE. OUR PATH IS WHAT WE MAKE IT.
UNDERSTAND, DAIGORO? IT MAY SEEM CRUEL, BUT HER PATH IS A HARD ONE. NOT EVEN WE CAN CHANGE THAT!
NOW GO BE CAREFUL.
SIS!
TH-THANK YOU...

HEY! OVER THERE!
HALT!
SHE'S STILL HERE!
LITTLE BITCH!

THAT'S A GO-RŌNIN-SAN'S ROOM. LOOK SHARP YOU DON'T OFFEND HIM.
YES, MA'AM.

TORIZŌ, CHIEFTAIN OF THE KIOROSHI SYNDICATE. I CONTROL ALL THE BROTHELS AND PROCURERS IN BOSHŪ.

....
....

THE YOUNG LADY IS AN AMEMA, PROCURED BY MY ZEGEN, WAHNING MATSU. SHE BELONGS TO US.
I MUST ASK FOR HER RETURN.

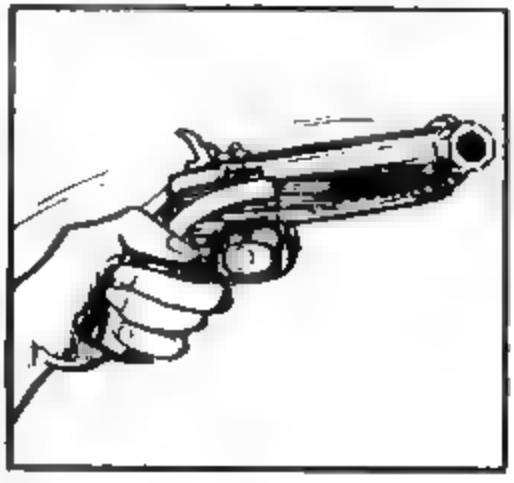
KRAK
I REFUSE.

O SAMURAI-SAMA.
THE WORLD CALLS US BŌHACHI.. OR AGAIN, KUTSUWA.

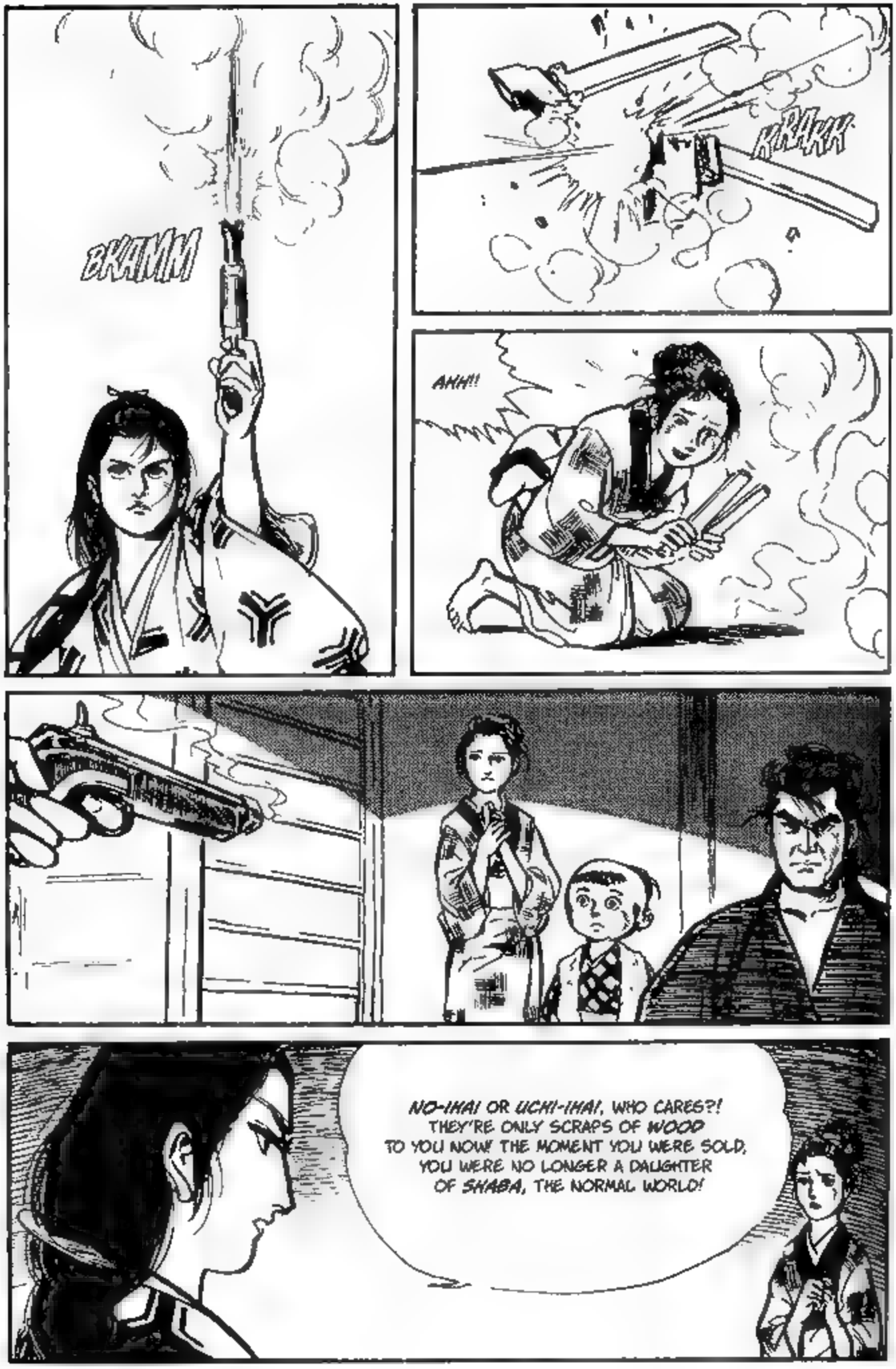
I THINK YOU KNOW WHY...

....
....

BŌHACHI! THOSE WHO FORGET THE EIGHT VIRTUES- FILIAL PIETY, RESPECT FOR ELDERS, LOYALTY, HONESTY, DUTY, PEACE, MODESTY, SHAME!
WE ARE YAKUZA! OUTSIDERS! WE KNOW NO SHAME!



WIN OR LOSE, YOU GAIN NOTHING BY DEFYING US! AND YOU LOSE NO FACE, O-SAMURAI-SAMA, BY RETURNING HER. NOW PLEASE. WITHDRAW.
THAT YOUNG LADY MURDERED WHINING MATSU!
I SAID NO.

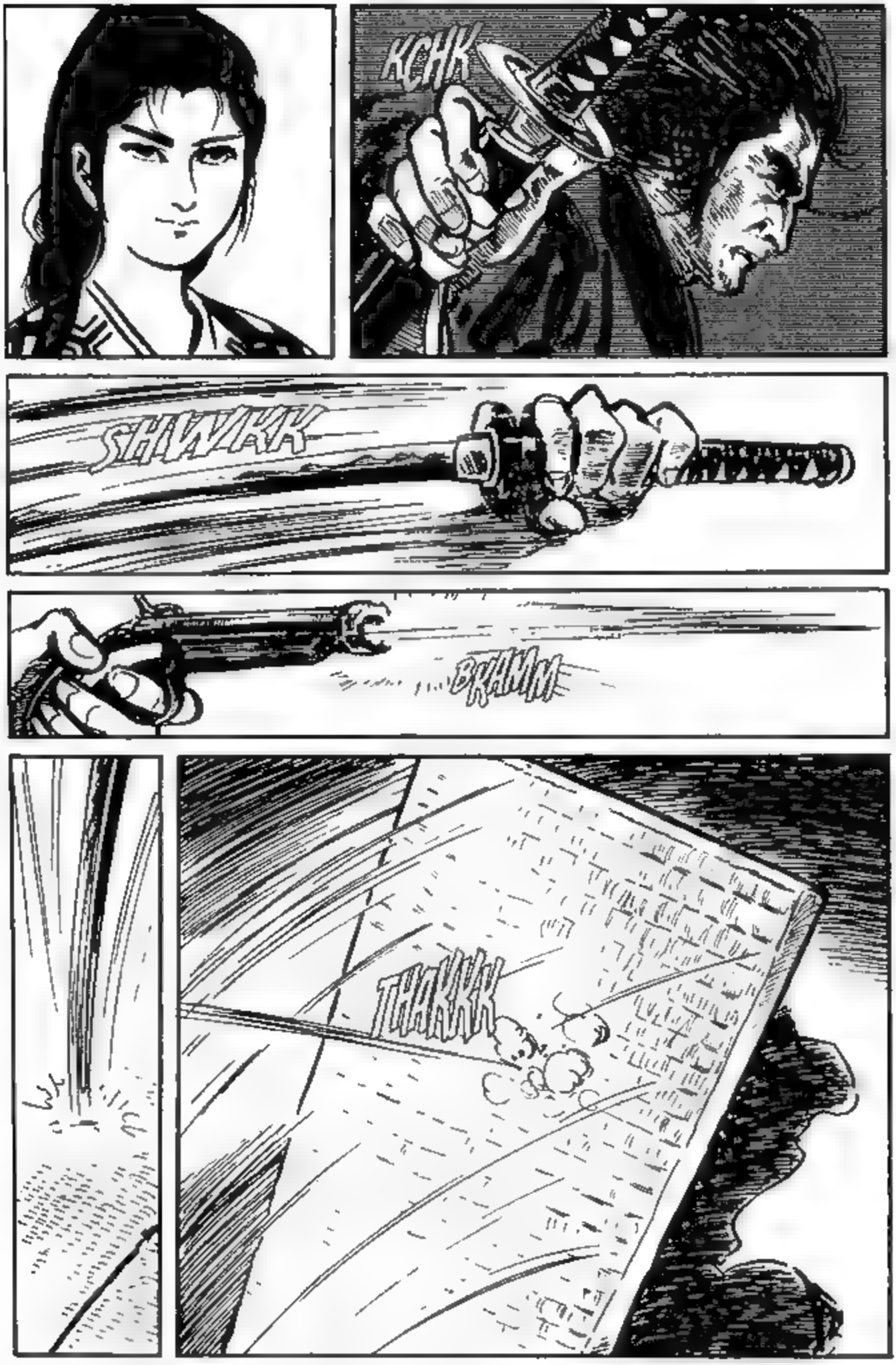

BKAMM
KRAKK
AHH!!
NO-IHAI OR UCHI-IHAI, WHO CARES?!
THEY'RE ONLY SCRAPS OF WOOD
TO YOU NOW! THE MOMENT YOU WERE SOLD,
YOU WERE NO LONGER A DAUGHTER
OF SHABA, THE NORMAL WORLD!

. . . .
. . . .
WILL YOU PUT A SACRED *IHAI* IN A *BROTHEL*? WILL YOU PRAY TO IT NIGHT AND DAY IN THE *WHOREHOUSE*? THAT'S NOT FOR *ANEMA* LIKE YOU! JUST BY *CARRYING* IT, YOU *BOUGHT* THIS *O-SAMURAI-SAMA'S* PITY!
IT'S LIKE THE BOSS *SAYS*! DON'T FORGET YOU'RE AN *ANEMA* NOW. WHINING MATSU *PAID* FOR YOU!
EVEN THE AUTHORITIES BUTT OUT OF *BŌHACHI* BROTHELS. I'LL GET YOUR MURDER CHARGE DROPPED.
BUT YOU'LL WORK YOUR *ASS OFF* MAKING UP FOR IT!
NOW COME HERE!
. . . .
. . . .
SHIT, GIRL! YOU *STILL* DON'T GET IT?!

YOU TEST MY PATIENCE!
IF YOU KEEP THIS UP, THIS O-SAMURAI-SAMA AND HIS SON...
...WILL DIE! ALL BECAUSE OF YOU!
THE SHABA AND THE BROTHEL MUST NEVER MIX! THAT'S OUR CODE!
AN ANEMA BOUGHT WITH A ZEGEN'S MONEY MUST HONOR IT, TOO!
SNIFF!
GET OVER HERE! NOW!!

IF YOU DON'T HAND HER OVER, I--
ENOUGH!
I'VE STOOD ON THIS *DIRT*, EXPLAINING EVERYTHING, AND *STILL* YOU REFUSE? I DON'T *UNDERSTAND* YOU!
YOU RISK YOUR AND YOUR SON'S LIVES FOR AN *ANEMA*? WHY.

NOT NO-IHAI! NOT UCHI-IHAI! IT WAS A KATAMI-IHAI, FOR PARENT AND CHILD PARTED IN LIFE!
A LIVING IHAI, FOR A FAMILY NEVER TO MEET AGAIN! A PLEDGE TO NEVER DESPAIR. A PROMISE TO NEVER HATE THE PARENTS WHO WERE FORCED TO SELL HER--TO KEEP THEM ALWAYS IN HER HEART AND PRAYERS! HOW CAN WE WHO WALK THE SIX PATHS AND THE FOUR LIVES IGNORE THIS FILIAL PIETY!? THIS PIETY WE HAVE LOST?!
ONLY WE WHO LIVE IN THE SHADOW OF MEIFUMADŌ CAN SAVE HER!
I HAVE SEEN THE IHAI! THAT IS REASON ENOUGH NOT TO TURN AWAY!


KCHK
SHWKK
BRAUM
THAKKK

SKRASH

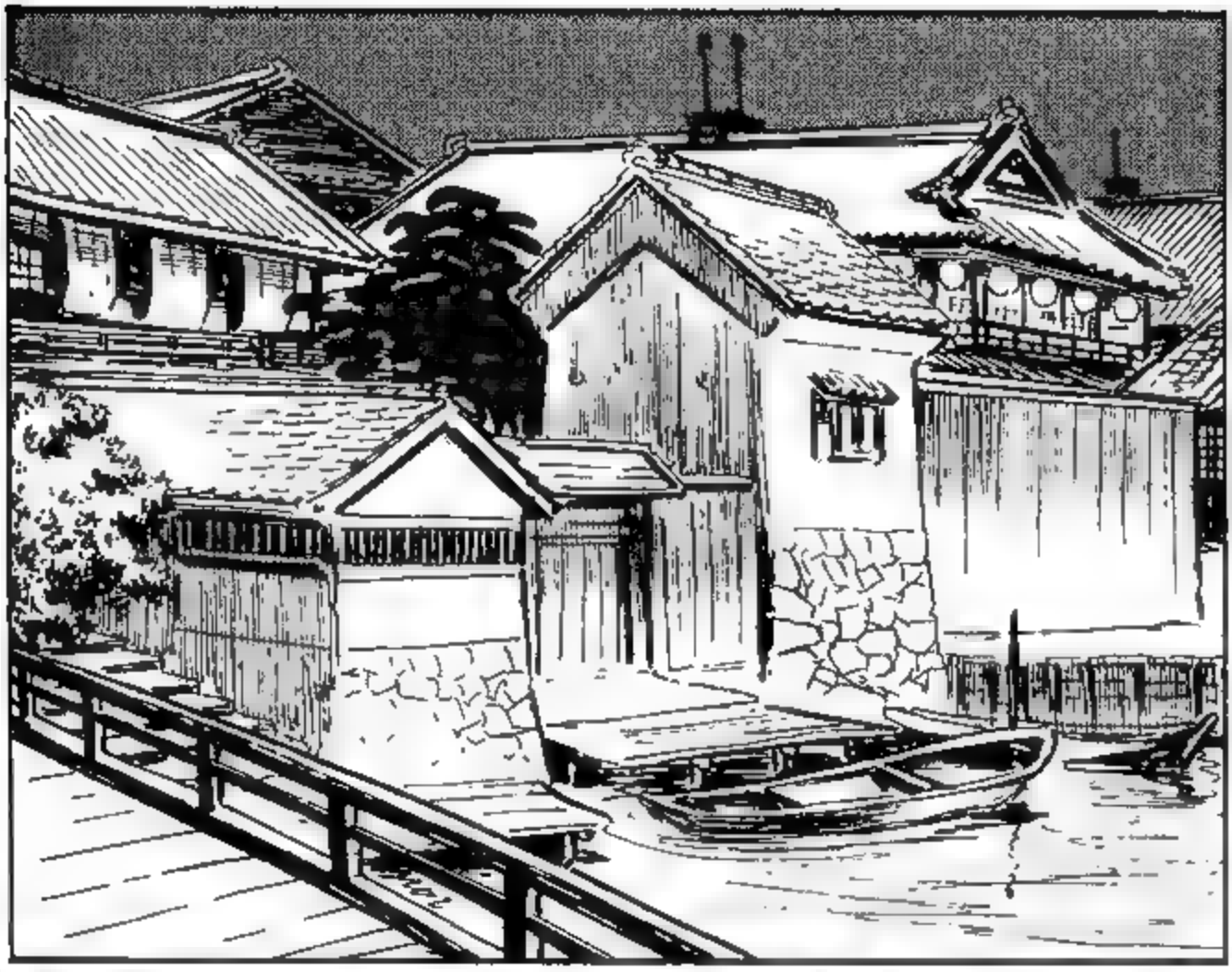
FWAM

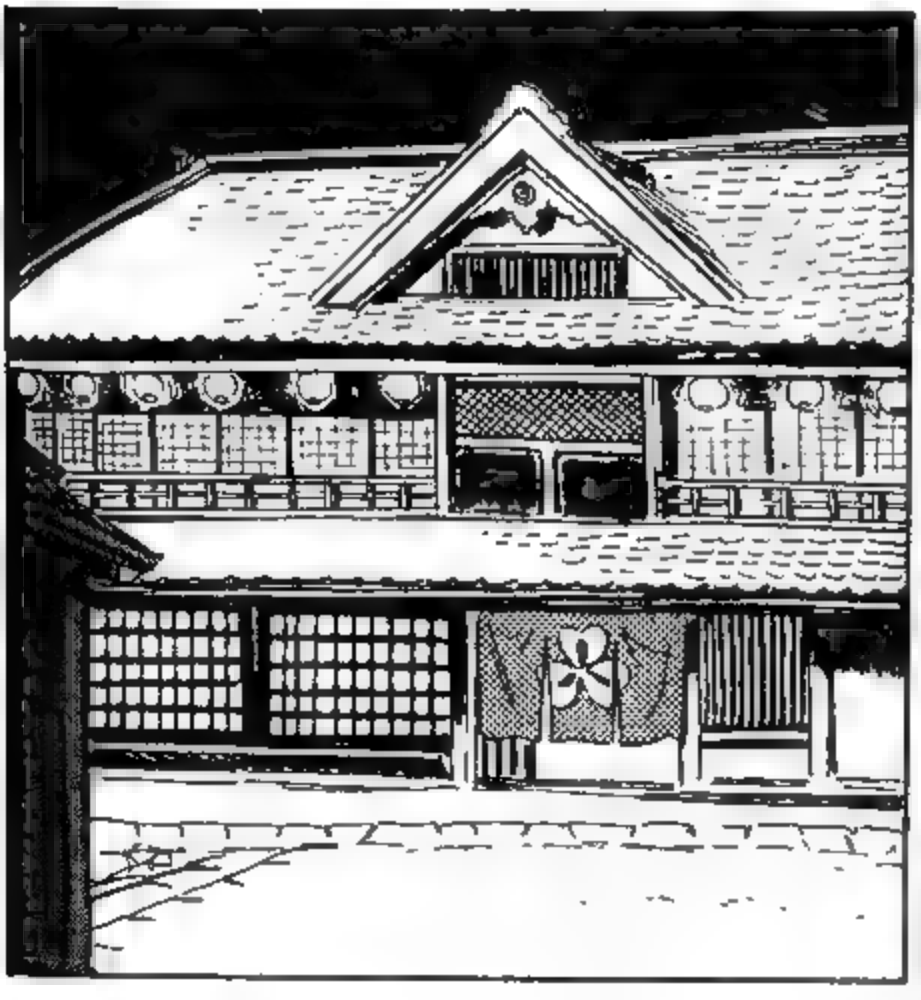
THWAMM

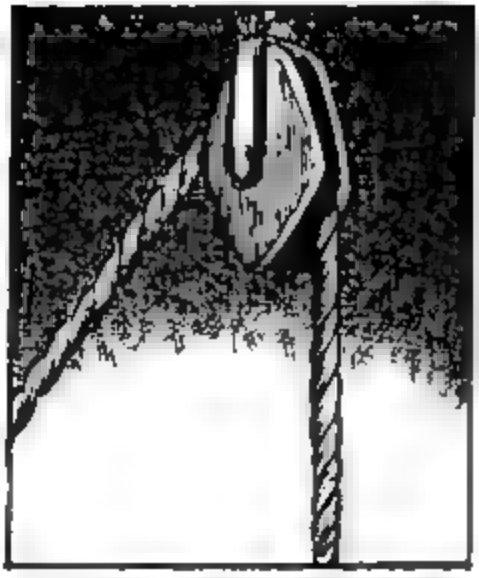
KAH!!
FWAM
THAMM
BASTARD!
TAKE HIM, BOYS!!
HALT!!
I COULD LOSE YOU ALL AND STILL NOT WIN!
I WON'T SEND MY PRECIOUS BOYS AGAINST SUCH A SWORDSMAN FOR A MERE ANEMA!
B-BUT_ BOSS!

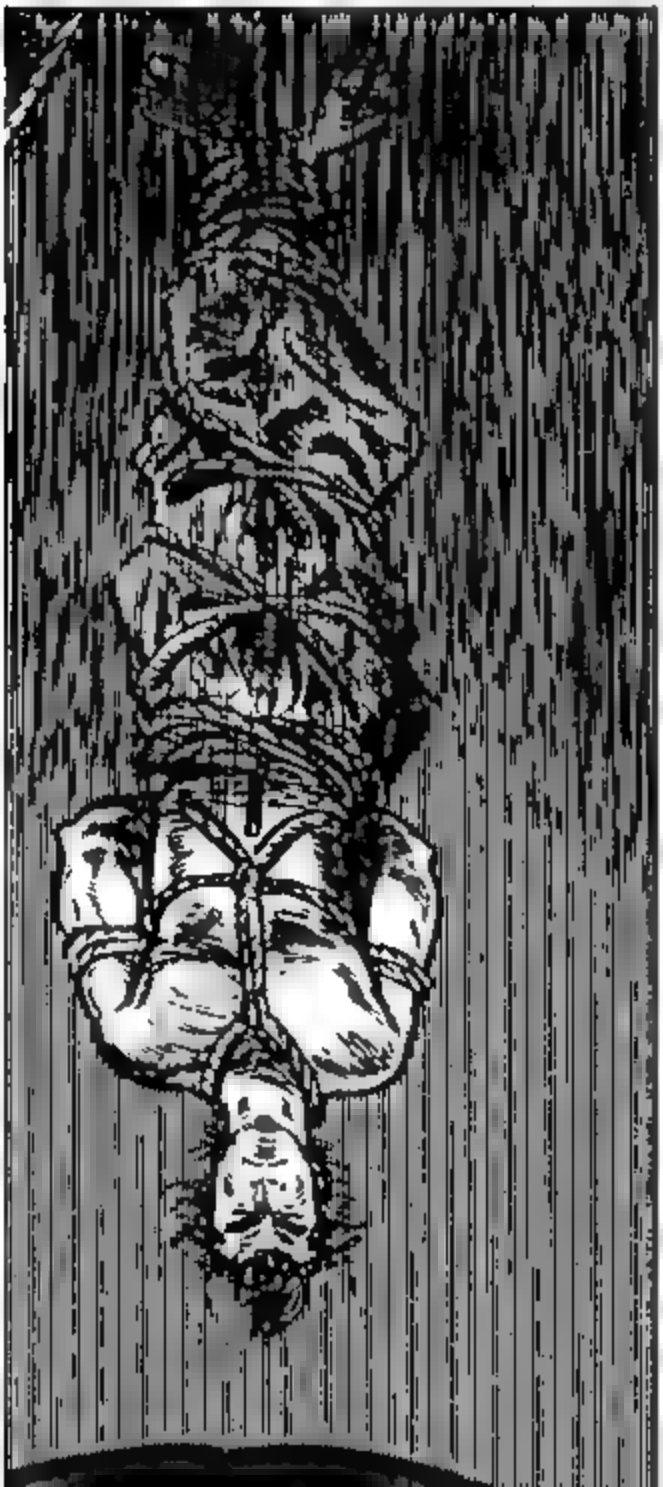
O-SAMURAI-SAMA! YOU MAY LIVE BY THE SIX WAYS AND THE FOUR LIVES, BUT WE BŌHACHI ALSO HAVE FACE TO SAVE! SO.. A PROPOSAL!
. . . .
. . . .
AN ANEMA BECOMES A TRUE ANNYA PROSTITUTE WHEN SHE'S DEFLOWERED BY HER FIRST MAN! IN OUR WORLD, WE CALL THAT MIZU-AGE, AND WE GET A TIDY SUM FOR IT, TOO!
YOU DO THE MIZU-AGE! HELP HER FULFILL THAT ONE DUTY.. AND I'LL SET HER FREE!
UNACCEPT-ABLE!
THEN THERE'S ONLY ONE OTHER WAY!
WATER TORTURE AND THE SPINNING TORTURE, THE PUNISHMENTS OF THE BŌHACHI BUT SHE MIGHT DIE..
SO BE IT THEN I'LL TAKE HER PLACE.
BUT .. YOU'RE NOT ..

WHEN A PROSTITUTE IS ILL, HER FELLOW PROSTITUTES CAN VOLUNTEER TO BE PUNISHED IN HER PLACE.
YOU HAVE NO RULES AGAINST REPLACEMENTS!
AND IF WE SHOULD KILL YOU, O-SAMURAI-SAMA. WHAT THEN?
YOU READ ME WELL. I SEE NOW WHY WOMEN HAVE LED THE KIOROSHI BŌHACHI FOR GENERATIONS!
YOU FLATTER ME.
TH-THANK YOU. THANK YOU... O-SAMURAI-SAMA...

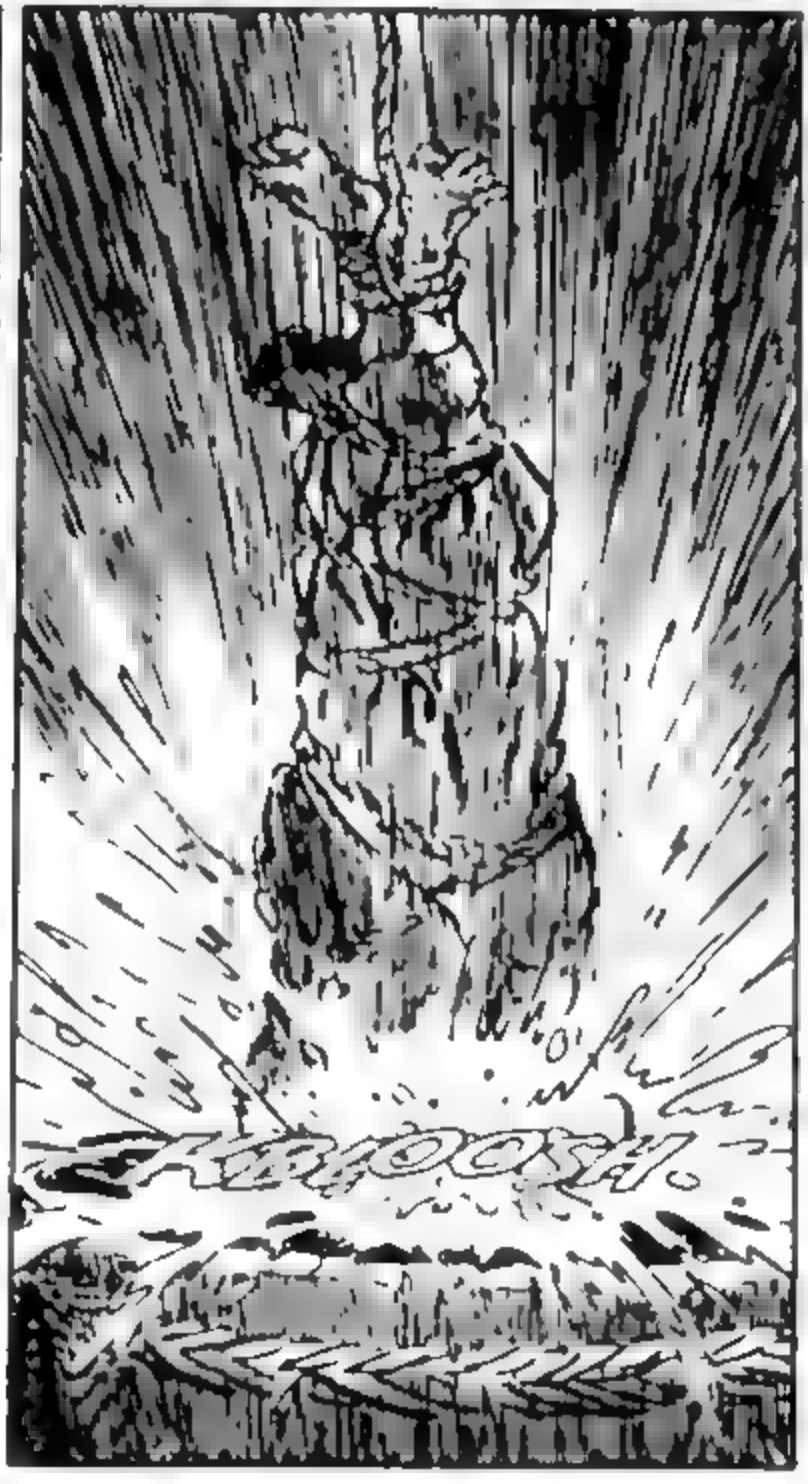


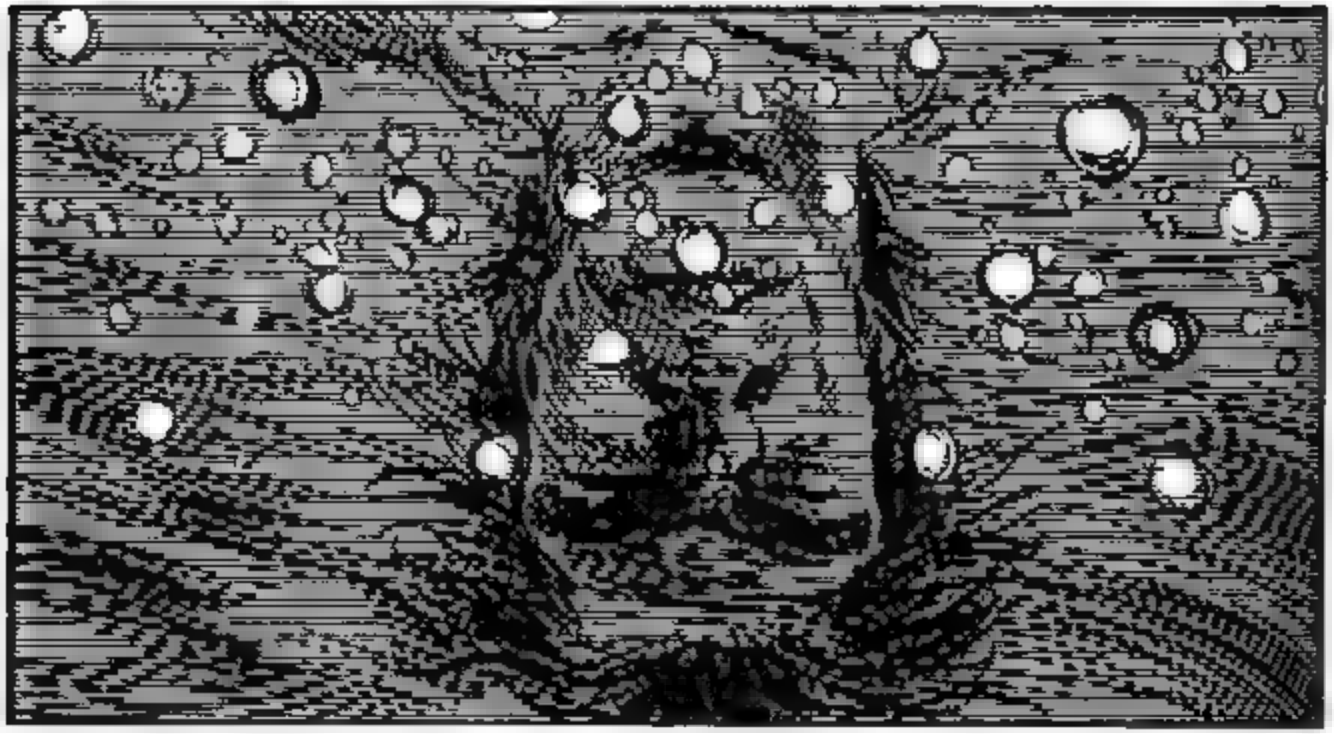




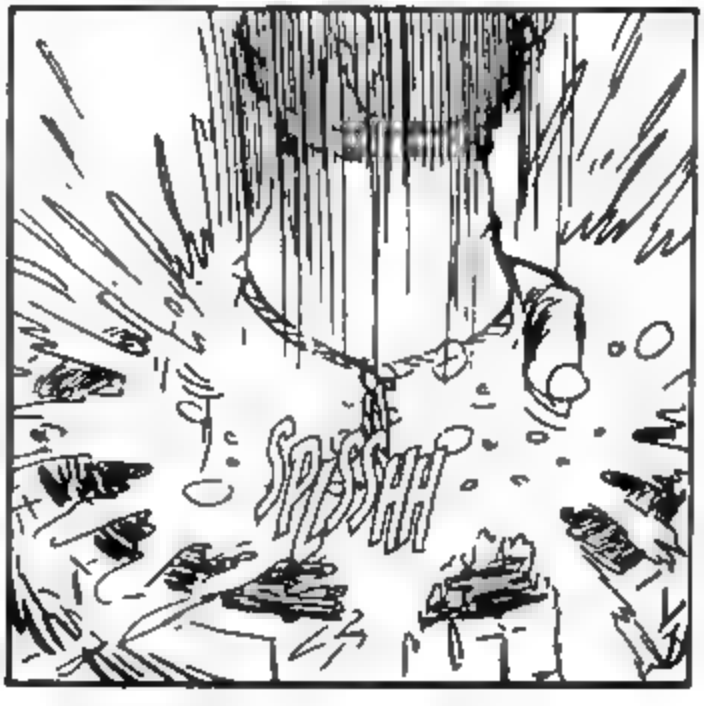


DO IT!


KRRACK!

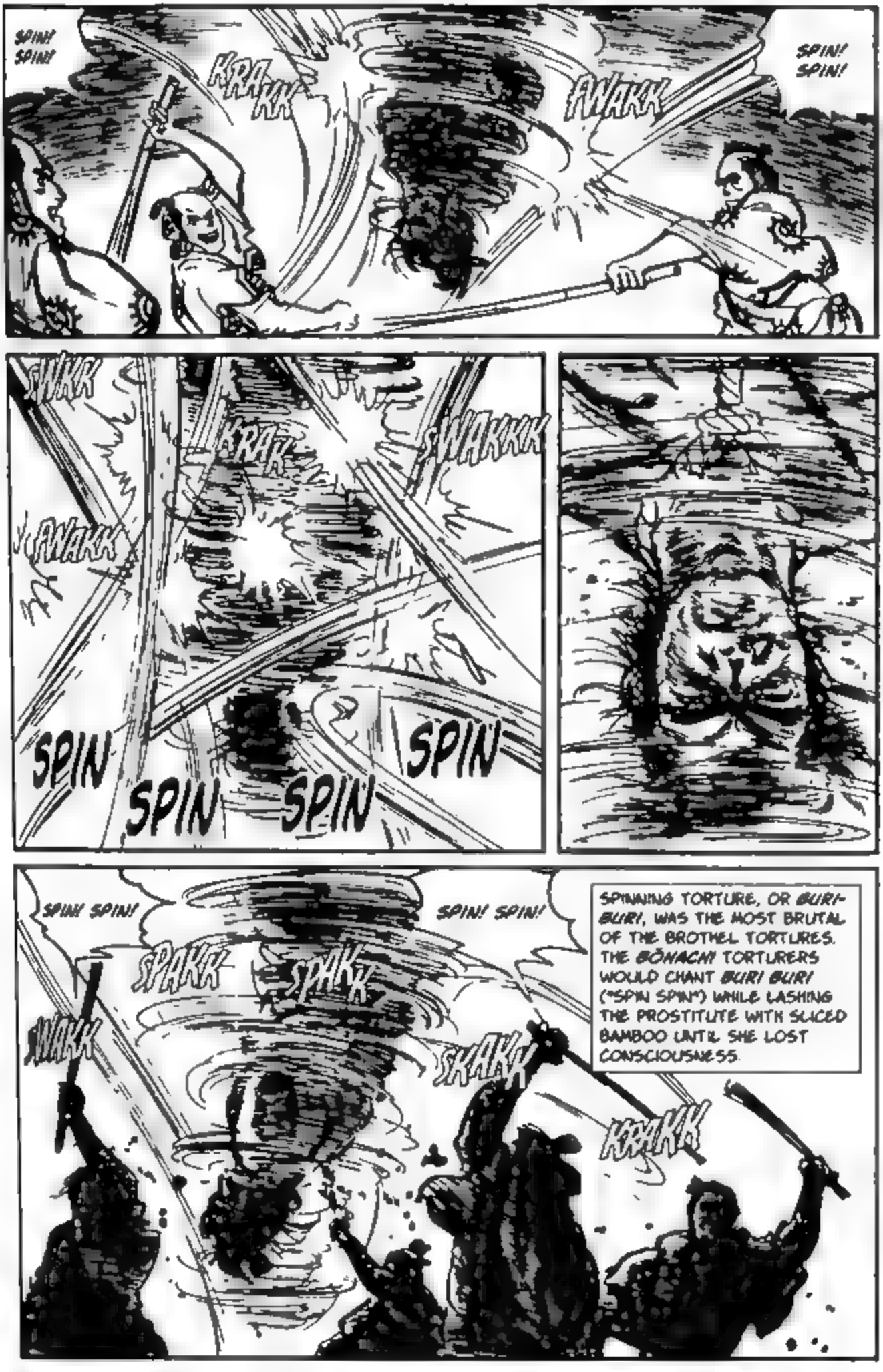


AHH..!


SPLASH!

THE WATER TORTURE WAS THE MOST COMMON OF ALL PUNISHMENTS FOR PROSTITUTES. THE TORTURE SYMBOLIZED REBIRTH, ADOPTING A NEW PERSONALITY, REDEDICATION TO HER WORK. FOR THIS REASON, THE TORTURE WOULD BEGIN AT THE ZODIACAL HOUR OF THE PROSTITUTE'S BIRTH, AND CONTINUE THROUGH TWELVE CYCLES OF DUNKING AND SUBMERSION UNTIL HER SIGN CAME UP AGAIN.

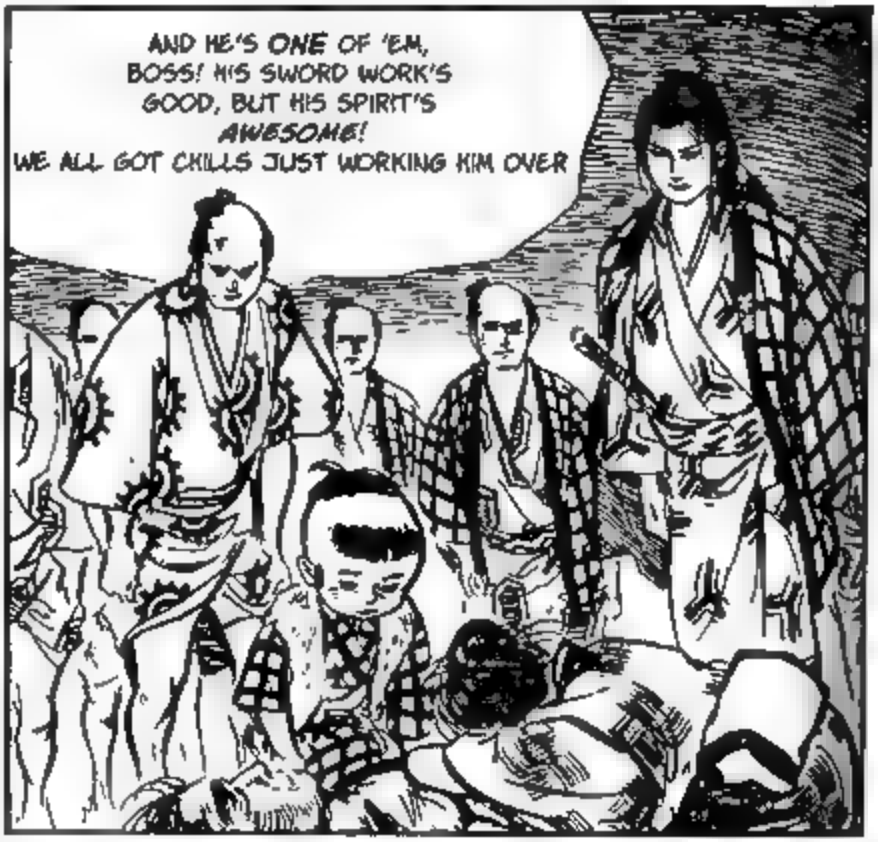
ENOUGH! THE SPINNING TORTURE!
YEAHH!
GO ON! SPIN! SPIN!

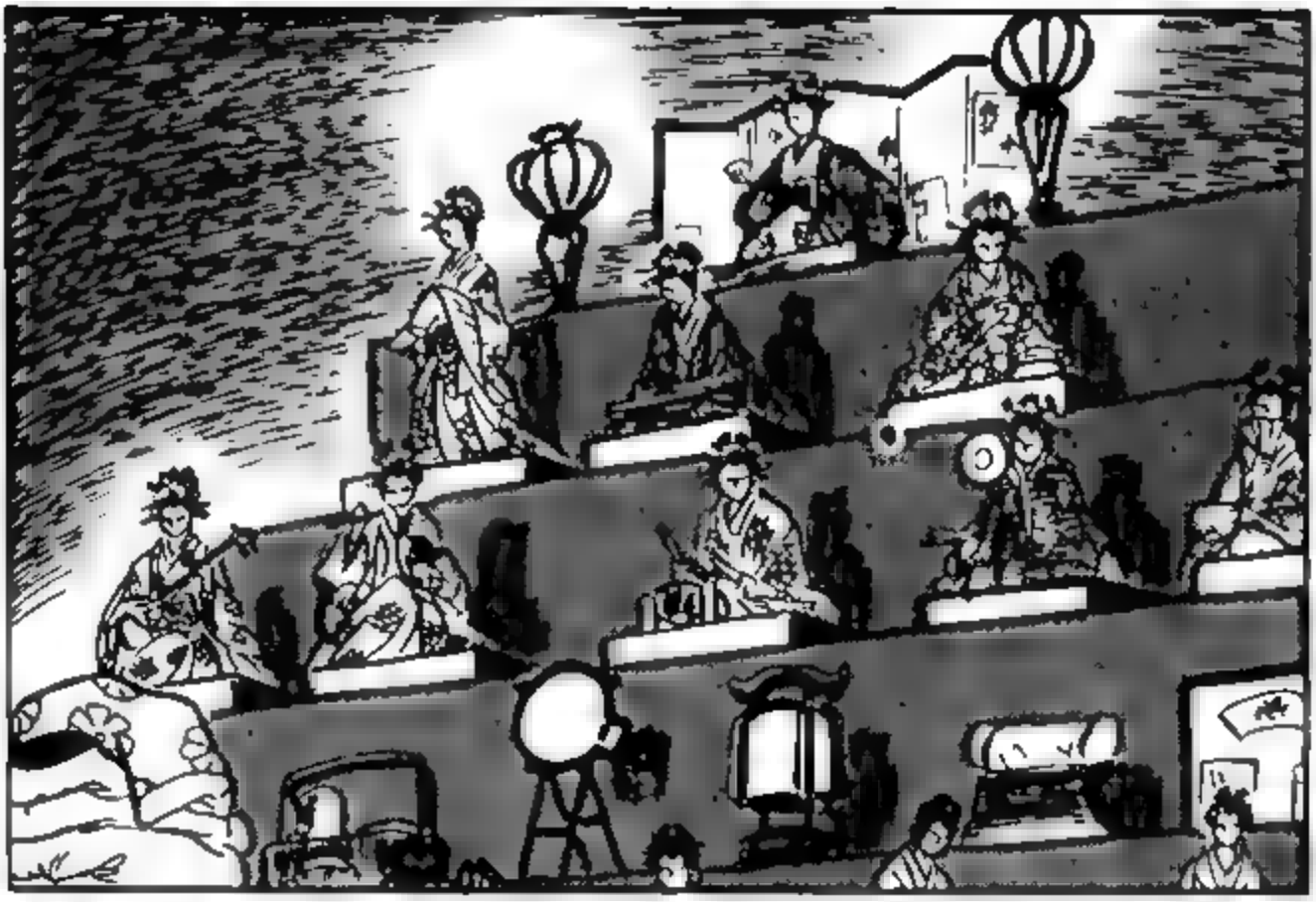

SPIN! SPIN!
KRAKK
AWAKK
SPIN! SPIN!
SWKK
KRAK
AWAKKK
AWAKK
SPIN
SPIN
SPIN
SPIN
SPIN! SPIN!
SPIN! SPIN!
SPAKK
SPAKK
SWAKK
SKAKK
KRAKK
SPINNING TORTURE, OR BURI-BURI, WAS THE MOST BRUTAL OF THE BROTHEL TORTURES. THE BŌNACHI TORTURERS WOULD CHANT BURI BURI ("SPIN SPIN") WHILE LASHING THE PROSTITUTE WITH SLICED BAMBOO UNTIL SHE LOST CONSCIOUSNESS.

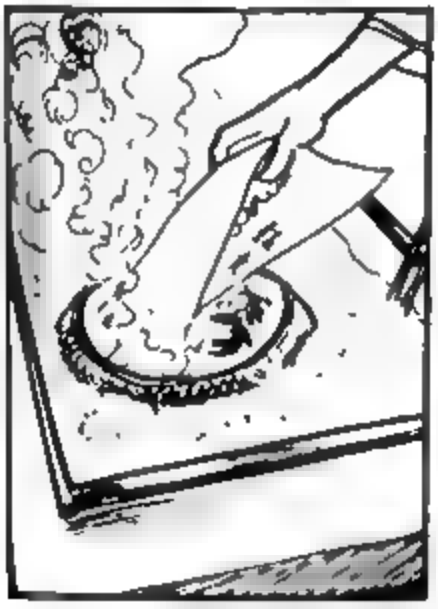
PAPA!
NO!!

I SHOULDN'T...
HOW COULD I...OH,
O-SAMURAI-SAMA...
sniff
sa-muhm

A TRUE SAMURAI SO FEW OF THEM LEFT...


AND HE'S ONE OF 'EM, BOSS! HIS SWORD WORK'S GOOD, BUT HIS SPIRIT'S AWESOME!
WE ALL GOT CHILLS JUST WORKING KIM OVER





THERE. I'VE BURNED YOUR CONTRACT. YOU'RE FREE TO GO BACK TO YOUR VILLAGE.
BUT, BUT I...

I'VE GOT TO...

THE DUTY AND DEBTS OF THE OF *UKIYO*, THE *FLOATING WORLD*, MEAN NOTHING TO US.
GO NOW. YOU NEED NOT PAY US BACK.
Y-YES, SIR. THANK YOU. SO MUCH...

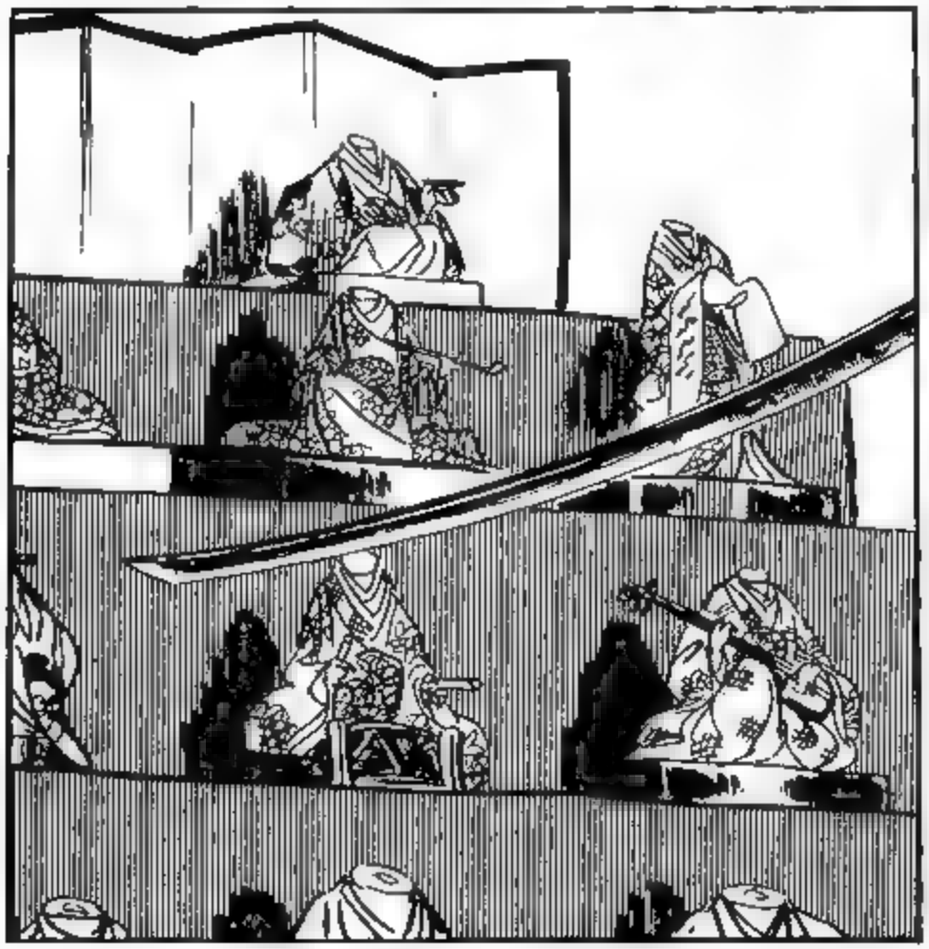
I'LL... NEVER FORGET! TO THE DAY I DIE.
DAIGORO. YOU MAY SAY GOODBYE.
UMN!
YET YOU REMAIN, O-SAMURAI-SAMA.
MY WORK IS NOT DONE.
YOU'RE NO TRAVELER! YOU CAME TO OUR KIOROSHI BROTHEL WITH A PURPOSE.
INDEED!
YOU SAID YOU LIVE IN MEIFUMADŌ, BY THE SIX WAYS AND THE FOUR LIVES. LET ME GUESS. YOU'RE..?
AN ASSASSIN! LONE WOLF AND CUB!
AND I'M YOUR PREY, PERHAPS..?
IF SO, I'LL FIGHT YOU TO THE DEATH!
NOT YOU!

KCHK
THESE!!
FSSST
SHOKK
SHSSK

CHOKK

SKSSH

THWKK

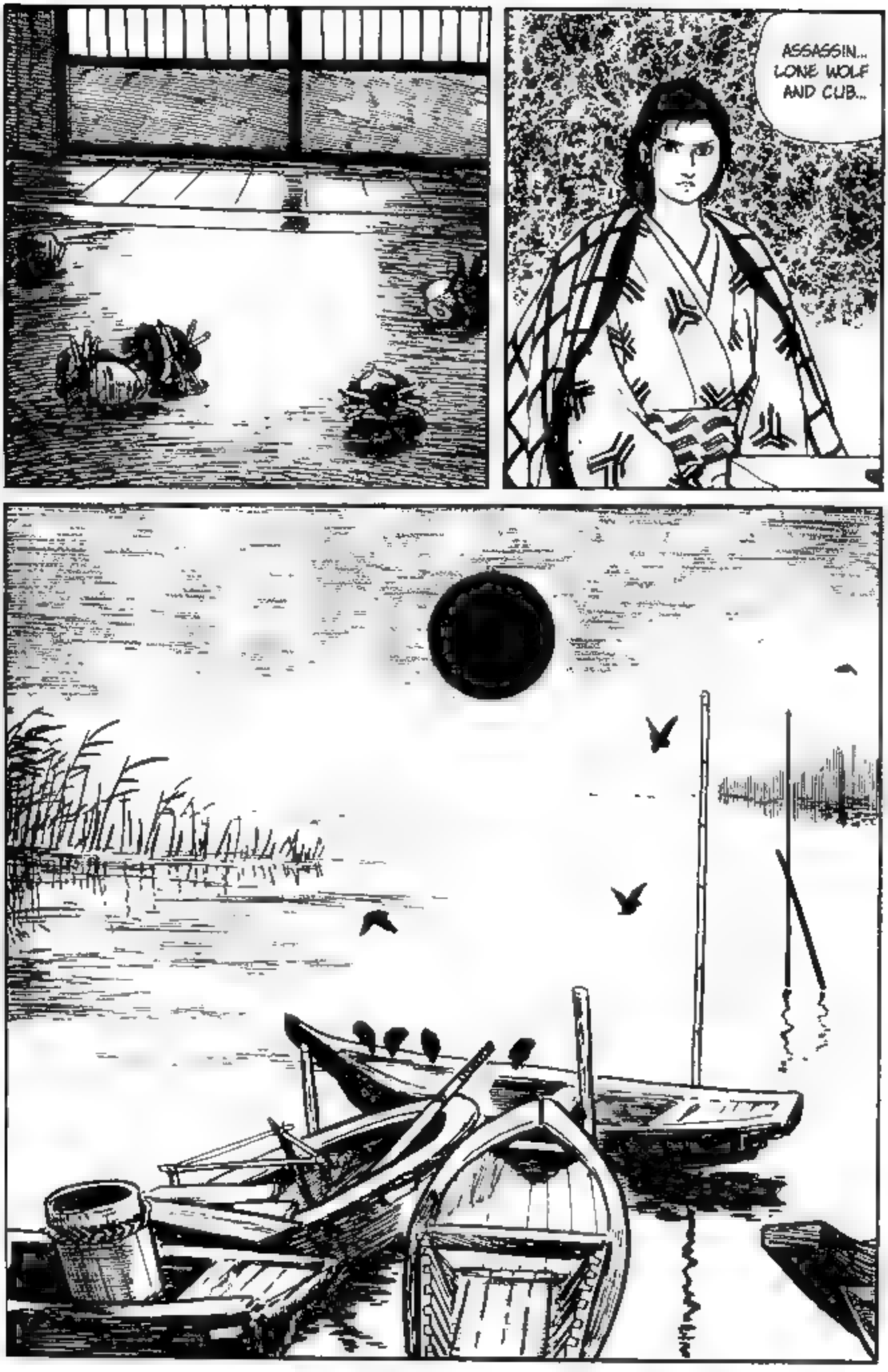


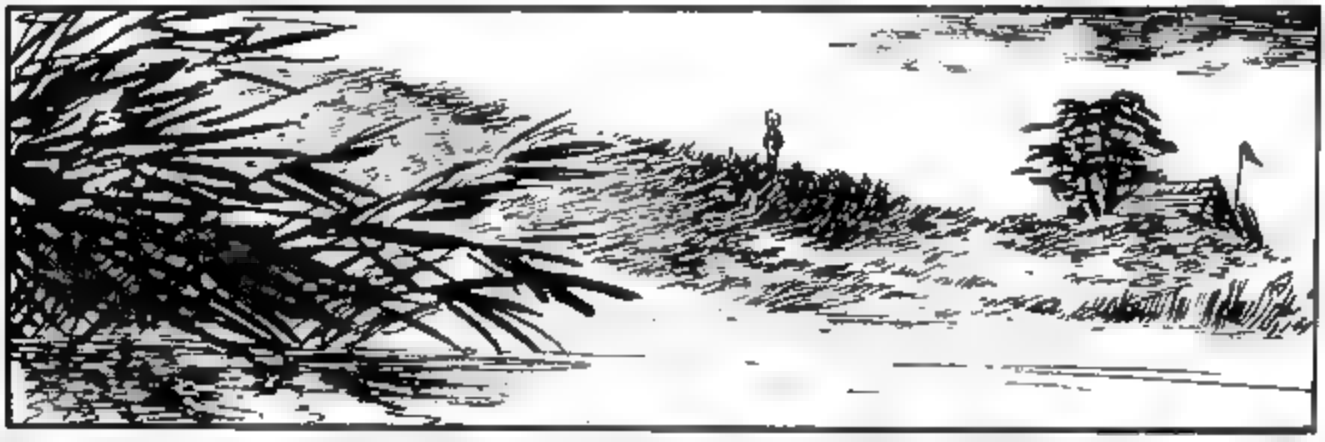
I WAS HIRED ON HER DEATHBED BY THE HUSK OF AN *ANNYA*, A WOMAN WHO SPENT HER LIFE IN *KIOROSHI* BROTHELS, AND WAS ABANDONED TO DIE ALONE WHEN SHE FELL ILL.

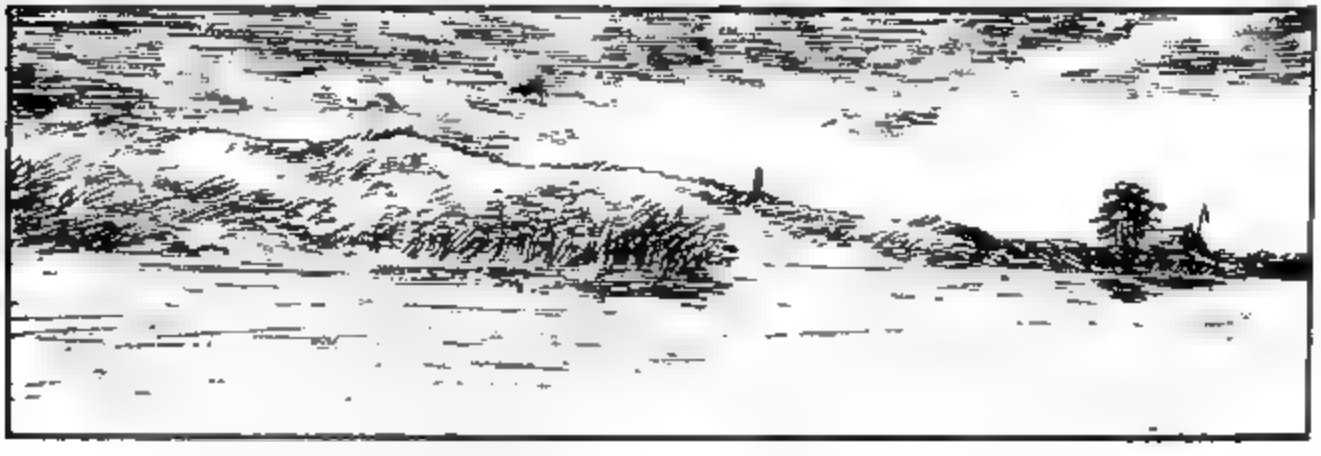
"KILL THE *ANNYA HINA DOLLS*," SHE TOLD ME...

....
....

"THEIR HAIR IS THE HAIR OF DEAD PROSTITUTES...THEIR CLOTHES ARE MADE FROM THE CLOTHES OF DEAD PROSTITUTES...
"THE HATRED OF MY DEAD SISTERS POSSESSES THE ANANYA HINA.
"WE CANNOT ACHIEVE SALVATION WHILE THEY LIVE.
SHHHAK
"KILL THEM PLEASE..."

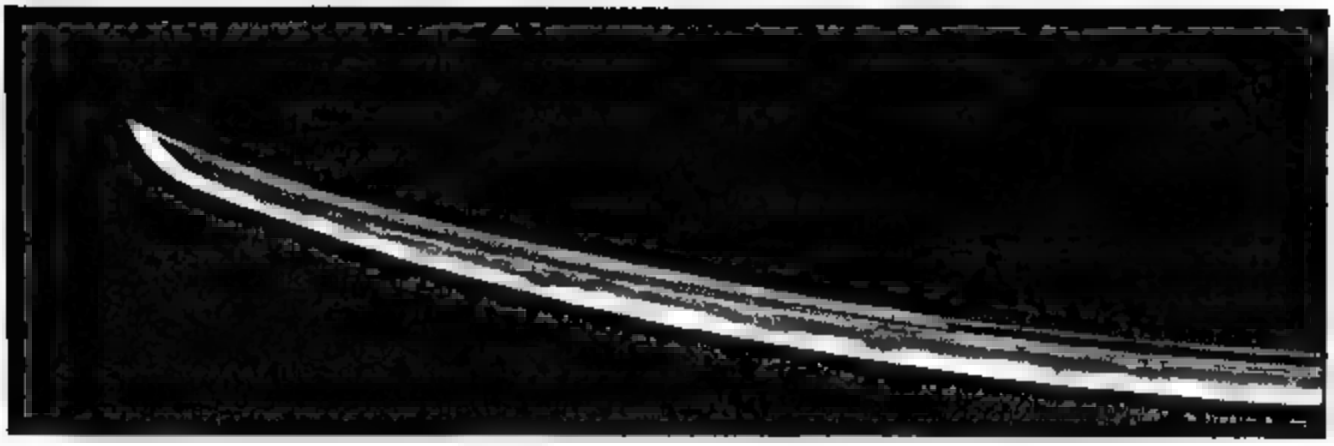

ASSASSIN... LONE WOLF AND CUB...

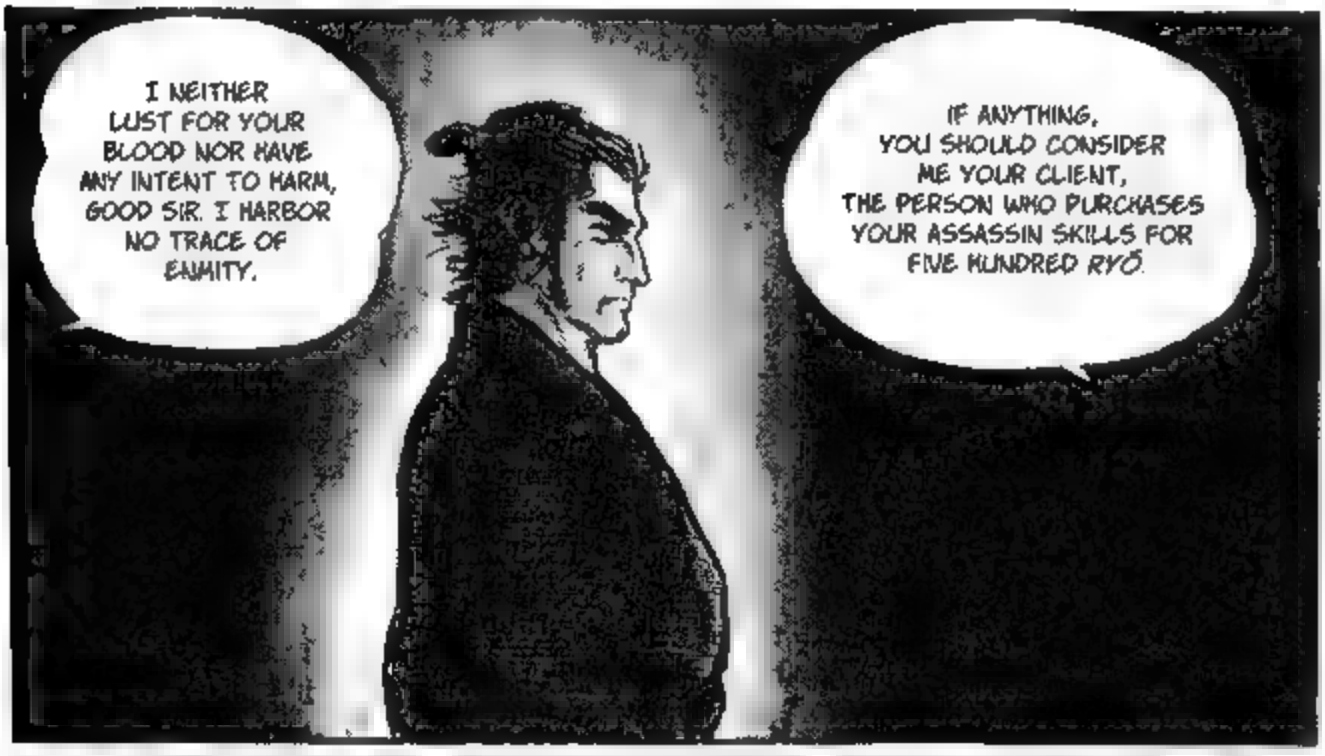




the nineteenth

Close Quarters




I NEITHER LUST FOR YOUR BLOOD NOR HAVE ANY INTENT TO HARM, GOOD SIR. I HARBOR NO TRACE OF ENMITY.
IF ANYTHING, YOU SHOULD CONSIDER ME YOUR CLIENT, THE PERSON WHO PURCHASES YOUR ASSASSIN SKILLS FOR FIVE HUNDRED RYŌ.

IS IT NOT THEN *INSULTING* TO SIT READY TO ***STRIKE*** WITH YOUR SWORD AT YOUR SIDE?
THIS IS A *DŌTANUKI* BATTLE SWORD.
TO ONE WHO BEARS THIS SWORD, THE WHOLE ***WORLD*** IS A BATTLEFIELD!
OF COURSE. THAT WAS CARELESS OF ME.
HMM.. A *DŌTANUKI*.
IT IS NOT AS IF I DOUBT YOUR SKILLS, BUT MIGHT I POSE A QUESTION OR TWO...?
AS YOU WISH..
SHOULD I SURROUND THIS TEA HOUSE WITH ***SPEARMEN***, OR PERHAPS, SPLASH IT WITH *OIL* AND SET IT ALIGHT...

OR LET US SAY THERE ARE *ARCHERS* AND *RIFLEMEN* WAITING FOR YOU TO EMERGE? WHAT THEN?
. . . .
. . . .
A MAN WHO LIVES BY ONE LONELY SWORD!
YOUR MOVEMENT RESTRICTED, YOUR FIELD OF VISION CONSTRAINED! IN SHORT, *SHISEKI-NO-CHI*—CLOSE QUARTERS! WISER NEVER TO HAVE ENTERED, HMM?
AND IF I WERE IN FACT AN ASSASSIN WHO ENTERED THIS TIGER'S LAIR TO KILL YOU, GO-JŌDA!?
WHAT *THEN?!*

AH?!

KCHK

MY GOD! C-CAN IT BE-?!

KCHK

KANGG KANG KANG

IMPOSSIBLE! SURELY YOU..!

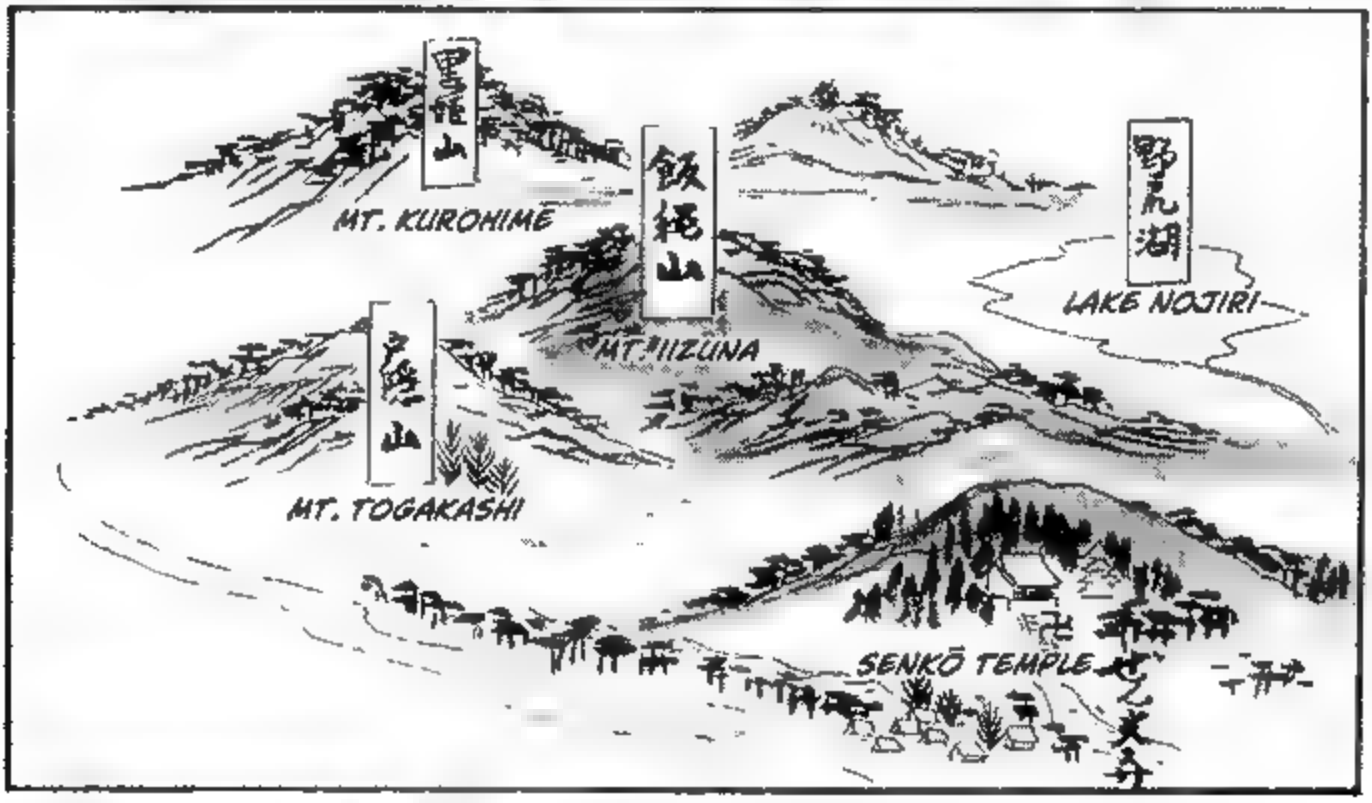
MY BLOOD LUST? DO YOU *FEEL* IT?

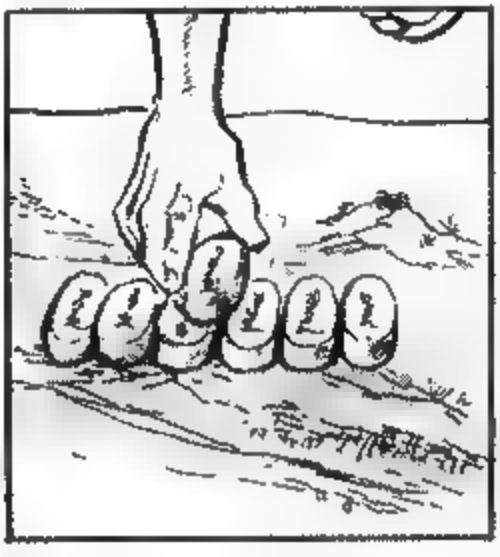
GO JŌDAI!

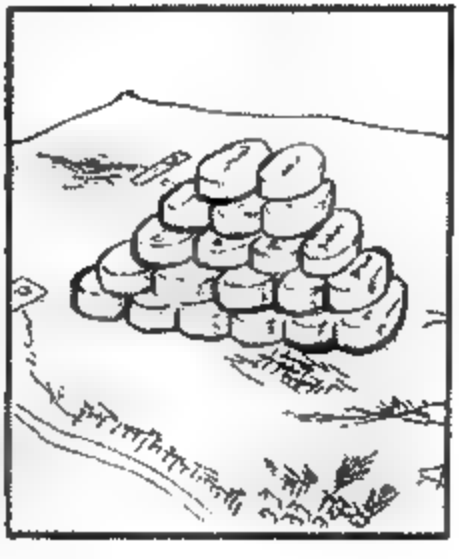
THK
?!
IT WAS YOU WHO ASKED
IT WAS I WHO ANSWERED, BODY AND SOUL...
AH!
LONE WOLF AND CUB INDEED!

AND YET, YOUR *SAKKI* WAS... TERRIFYING.
IT WAS FOOLISH OF ME TO TEST YOU, GOOD SIR. PLEASE GRANT ME PARDON.
. . . .
. . . .
THE MEN I PLACED IN AMBUSH WERE THE BEST IN OUR *HAN*, ACCOMPLISHED AT CONCEALING THEIR *SAKKI*, ANY SENSE OF THEIR PRESENCE...
TO HAVE YOU *DETECT* THEM, JUST LIKE THAT. I AM PUT IN MY PLACE!
. . . .
. . . .

IN THAT CASE, YOUR NEXT SHISEKI-NO-CHI...


黒姫山
MT. KUROHIME
飯綱山
MT. IIZUNA
野尻湖
LAKE NOJIRI
戸隠山
MT. TOGAKASHI
SENKŌ TEMPLE





KYAHH
KILL THIS ONE MAN, KASAMA DAISUKE...
AND WE CAN HANDLE THE REST
THIS IS MY REQUEST!
SKRRSH

"WE ARE A DESPERATELY POOR *HAN*, A MERE THIRTY THOUSAND *KOKU*.

"TWO YEARS AGO, WE WERE GASPING UNDER A TWENTY-THOUSAND *RYŌ* DEBT TO THE RICE MERCHANTS.

"YET TODAY, NO MORE FROWNS! OUR COFFERS OVERFLOW WITH TENS OF THOUSANDS OF *RYŌ*.

"AS YOU KNOW, OUR *HAN* COVERS THE MOUNTAIN RANGE AROUND *MOUNT IIZUNA*. WE HAVE REMARKABLE FORESTRY RESOURCES—CEDAR, CYPRESS...

"WE HARVEST THE TIMBER, SEND IT DOWN THE *SHINANO RIVER* TO *SHIONADA*, GO OVERLAND VIA THE *NAKASENDŌ* BYWAY TO *SAKAMOTO*, AND THEN A LAST FLOAT DOWN THE *FURU-TONE RIVER* INTO *EDO*.

"UNTIL NOW, WE HAD NO WAY TO TRANSPORT THIS TIMBER. A TREASURE ROTTING UNTOUCHED! EVERYONE SAID WE WOULD LOSE MONEY BUILDING LUMBER ROADS TO GET IT OUT NINE *RI* THROUGH MOUNTAINS! BUT I PREVAILED

"AND WHAT PERFECT TIMING FOR THE GREAT FIRES IN EDO! ONE SHOULD NOT REJOICE AT ANOTHER'S ADVERSITY, YET IT WAS DIVINE PROVIDENCE FOR OUR HAN OF COURSE, I HAD PREDICTED IT MIGHT HAPPEN, WITH EDO GROWING THE WAY IT IS
"OUR TIMBER REACHES THEM FASTER THAN KISO, HIDA OR KISHŪ LUMBER, MUCH LESS EZO CYPRESS! AND SINCE I INSISTED WE SELL DIRECT, INSTEAD OF USING HIDA-YA, SUHARA-YA AND THE OTHER LUMBER WHOLESALERS, WE UNDERSELL THEM ALL! OF COURSE THERE WERE PROBLEMS, BUT NOW EVERYTHING RUNS SMOOTHLY.

"EXCEPT_"
THE PRECEPTS OF OUR HAN STRICTLY FORBID CUTTING DOWN THE IIZUNA FORESTS!!
PAYING DEBTS IS IMPORTANT, BUT HOW CAN WE PREY ON VICTIMS OF THE FIRES IN EDO TO SELL WOOD?
IT'S UNWORTHY OF SAMURAI!
OUR ANCESTOR LORD YASUMASA FORBADE FELLING THE FOREST TO PREVENT FLOODING!
ONE HEAVY RAIN, AND THE RIVERS WILL OVERFLOW! IIZUNA HAN WILL BE DROWNED!
THE JŌDAI FATTENS HIS OWN POCKETS IN THE NAME OF DEBT RELIEF!
HE'D ABANDON A HUNDRED YEARS OF PEACE FOR SHORT-TERM PROFITS!
KILL THE SCOUNDREL!
PUNISH HIM!
YAHH!!

"WHEN THE STARVING MAN EATS, HUNGER IS FORGOTTEN, THE SAYING GOES. OUR YOUNG *HANSHI*, FORGETTING YESTERDAY'S CRISIS, *TURNED* ON ME!"

VILLAIN! DIE!
SCHOKK
DIVINE PUNISH-MENT!
SHAKK
SKUSSH

WHAT?!
NO!
IT'S EMPTY!
OVER HERE!
IT'S THE MATSUKE AND HIS MEN!
IT'S A TRAP!
TRICKERY!!

Y'AAHHHH!
SKSSH
HYAH!
SSCHOP
GYARRH!

I ARRANGED TO LURE OUT THE DISSIDENTS WHO OPPOSED ME, BUT THERE WERE MANY MORE THAN I'D EXPECTED...

"THE SURVIVORS STOLE GUNS AND GUNPOWDER, AND FLED TO THE NORTH FLANKS OF MOUNT IIZUNA.

"THE NORTH FLANKS HAVE ANOTHER NAME— THE *CRADLE OF WIND!* IT'S A TREACHEROUS PLACE, A NATURAL FORT OVERLOOKING THE ENTIRE FOREST

"IF WE TRY TO TAKE THEM BY *FORCE*, THEY'RE SURE TO USE THAT UNCEASING WIND TO SET FIRES THAT WILL RAZE THE FOREST

"*THIS* IS MY GREATEST CONCERN! IF FIRE TAKES OUR *TIGER CUB*, OUR PRECIOUS TIMBER, OUR *HAN* IS *FINISHED.*

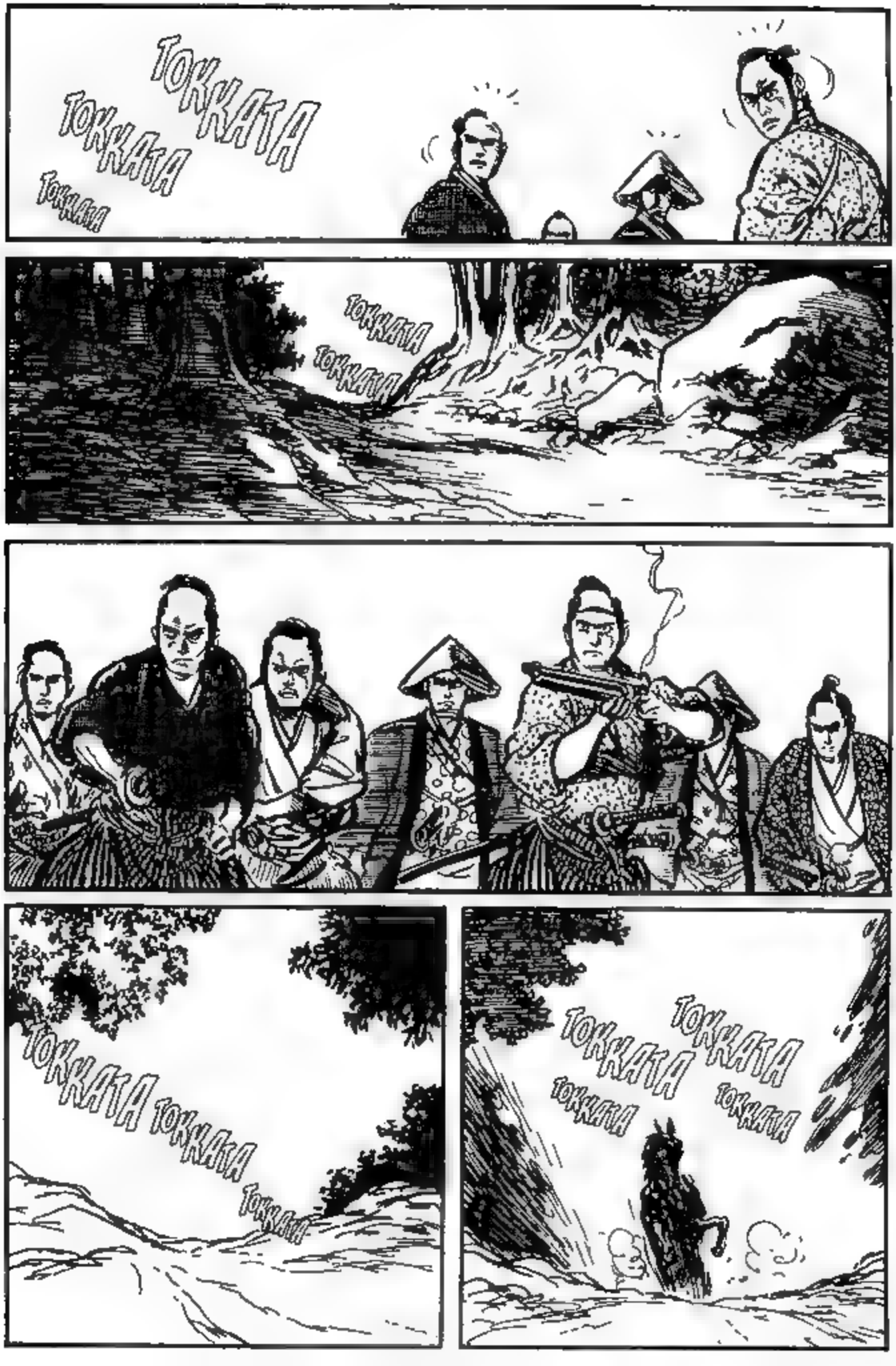
"AND SO THEY BUY TIME TO SEND A MESSENGER TO OUR *DAIMYŌ, LORD SHIGEHIRO,* AT HIS EDO ESTATE. THEY WILL DEFAME ME, I KNOW! REGARDLESS OF THE MERITS, I'LL BE HELD *RESPONSIBLE* FOR THIS *DISTURBANCE!*

"THEY'VE POSTED LOOKOUTS. THEY'VE EVEN ANNOUNCED THEY WILL BURN THE FOREST IF THEIR MESSENGER IS HARMED YOUR MISSION..

"ONE! KILL THEIR MESSENGER WHEN HE LEAVES FOR EDO!
"TWO! KILL THEIR LEADER, KASAMA DAISUKE!
"KASAMA IS SKILLED IN THE TAISHA-RYŪ. HIS LEADERSHIP ALONE WELDS THESE HOTHEADS TOGETHER. KILL HIM, AND THE REST FOLLOW.
"THREE! YOU MUST DO THIS WITHOUT ANY FIRE BEING SET!
"I REALIZE THIS IS NOT AN ASSASSIN'S CONCERN, BUT I TRUST YOU UNDERSTAND."

RELAX! THAT THREAT TO BURN THE FOREST *WORKED*. THEY HAVEN'T MADE A MOVE TO STOP US.
HEAVEN IS ON OUR SIDE! ONCE WE GET OUR PETITION TO OUR LORD IN EDO, THE *JŌDAI'S* FACTION IS *FINISHED!*

WE'RE COUNTING ON YOU! IT'S ALL ON YOUR SHOULDERS.
LEAVE IT TO ME!
IT WAS WORTH FIGHTING AFTER ALL!


TOKKATA
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TOKKATA

WAHHHH
TOKATA
TOKATA
TOKATA
THGGHATHGGHA

WAHH!
WAHH!
UWAHH!

WHAT?!

IT'S A KID!

A RUNAWAY HORSE!

SAVE HIM!!

THOKKATHOKKATHOKKA

THGGAIRGATHGGA

WAHHHH!

UWAAH!

WAAAH!

THGGAHTHGGAH

AAAAHH!

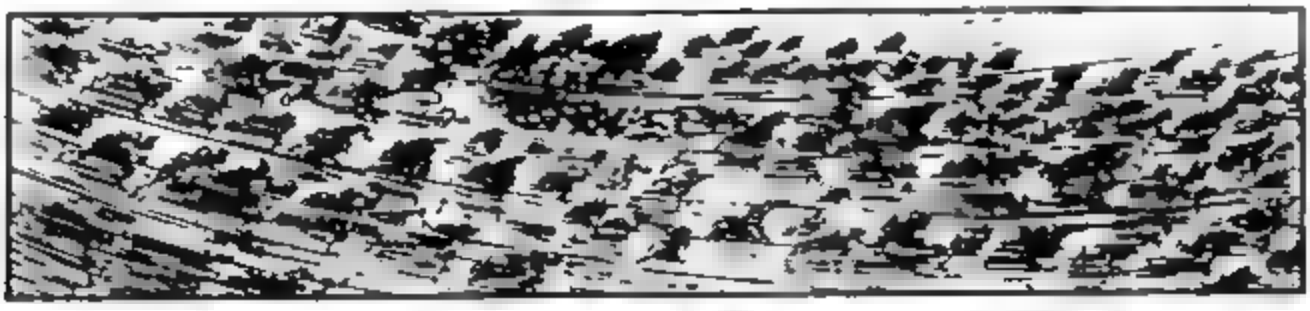
SSCHOK!
NNGAH!

GUEHH!
THUKKK
C-COWARD!!
WHO ARE YOU!?
ASSASSIN...
...LONE WOLF AND CUB!
SKSSSH

KSHH
Ah... VANITY...
USING A... A CHILD...
THUD
THUD
SPLIT
FORGIVE ME!

SKUSSH!

WHOOSH



KSSHH
KSSHH

WHO GOES THERE?!
WHAT THE... DEVIL?
A LITTLE KID? WAY OUT HERE?
YOU, BOY! WHAT ARE YOU DOING HERE?
. . . .
. . . .
WHERE'RE YOU FROM?
. . . .
. . . .
CAT GOT YOUR TONGUE?!
ARE YOU ALONE?!
. . . .
. . . .
THERE MAY BE SOMEONE ELSE. GO LOOK!

?!
IT'S VERY STRANGE, BUT...
I LOOKED, AND NO SIGN OF ANYONE.
THEN HOW'D HE GET HERE?
HE IGNORES OUR QUESTIONS, HE ISN'T SCARED, DOESN'T EVEN SEEM TO BE HUNGRY!
HE'S A STRANGE ONE. THEY SAY RACCOONS CAN SHAPE-CHANGE...
DON'T BE STUPID!
HE GIVES ME THE CREEPS, ANYWAY,

SHOULD WE TELL KASAMA?
YEAH. MAYBE THE KID HAS SOME CONNECTION WITH HIM.
ONE RING FOR EMERGENCIES, THREE WHEN WE GO UP?
GET IT RIGHT! ONE MISTAKE, AND THIS WHOLE FOREST GOES UP IN FLAMES.
YEAH...

HG

THG

AHH!

HEYY!

WHAT TH-!

UWAHH!

WHO THE HELL_?!

SHIT!!

SWISH

SKRRUSH

THUKK

SCHKRR

AUUGHHH!
FWMP

NAOKI!
THUNK
DAMN YOU!!

KRUKK
NGGAHH-
GNNG-

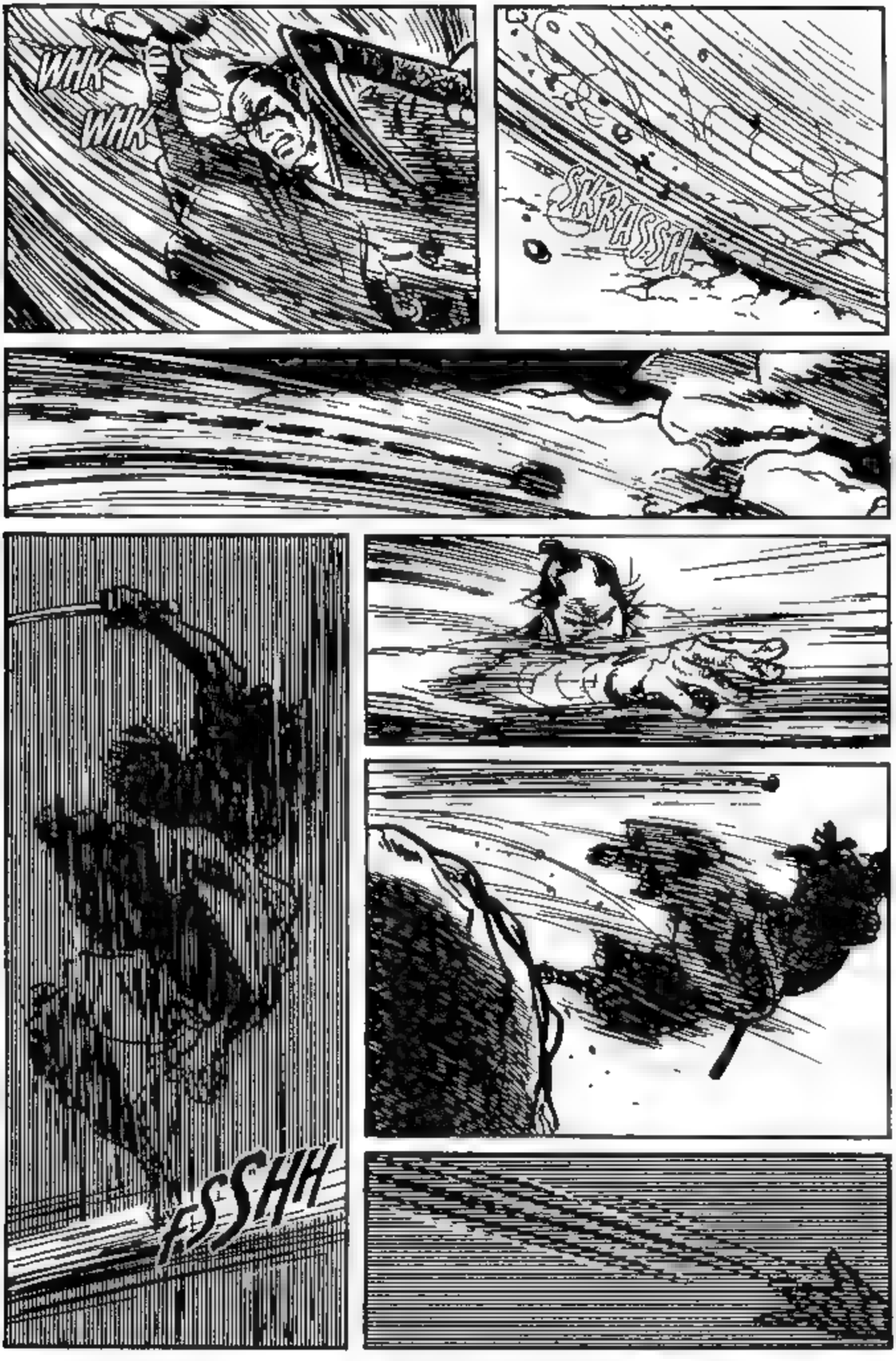
ONE...
TWO...
KANG-KTANG
KANG-KTANG
KANG-KTANG

NOT KIMURA OR THE OTHERS...
KASAMA-DONO OF THE TAISHA SCHOOL?

YOU'RE A LACKEY OF THE JŌDAI?!
ASSASSIN! LONE WOLF AND CUB!
LAUGHABLE! THIS IS A SHISEKI-NO-CHI! NO ROOM TO MOVE!
ONE WHO LIVES BY THE SWORD SHOULD KNOW BETTER.
KNOWING THAT, I SEEK A DUEL.
SO BE IT!
SHAKK
SUIŌ-RYŪ?!
YET YOU CANNOT WIN ON THIS TERRAIN, NO MATTER HOW SKILLED.

SHNNG
THIS CHAIN!
IT'S MADE FOR THIS SORT OF PLACE.
IT CAN REACH EVERY INCH OF THIS GROUND. AND WHEREVER IT SPINS, AN INESCAPABLE SHISEKI-NO-CHI.
WHKKK
WHKKK
WHKKK
NO SWORDSMAN CAN CLOSE THIS GAP!
FWSSH

FIGHT!
WHK-WHK-WHK-WHK
FSSH
FSSH
FSSH
F-SSH-T
SKANNG
SKANNG
FWWWK
FWAM
TKRAKK
KSHNNG


WHK
WHK
SKRASSH
FSSHH

SKRANG
B-BRILLIANT...! YOU THROW FROM OUTSIDE MY SHISEKI-NO-CHI
YOU ENTER THE SHIMA, FINDING LIFE IN THE FLEETING...
MOMENT...
THWD
NO...NO POINT SPEAKING OF RIGHT AND WRONG TO AN ASSASSIN... BUT...
IF... IF YOU TOO ARE A SAMURAI... TH... THE FOREST...

IF THEY CUT IT DOWN... YOU MUST SEE... FLOODS, DISASTER...
KUK... KRRK...
UHNGG - AGAIN
THWD

IF YOU STOP THE CUTTING WITH *FIRE*, THE RESULTS ARE THE *SAME!*
THOSE WHO DROWN WILL HATE YOU *ALL*, ONE OF A KIND! THE FOOLISHNESS OF *POWER STRUGGLES!* THIS FOREST YOU FIGHT OVER IS THE ONLY VICTIM!
GOOD WORK, LONE WOLF AND CUB!!
UNFORTUNATELY, I CAN'T LET YOU *LEAVE!*
WE FINISH *YOU* OFF, AND IT'S ALL OVER!
A GREAT *ASSASSIN!* BUT CURSE YOUR STUPIDITY FOR ENTERING THIS *SHISEKI-NO-CHI!*

BWA HAH HAH! DIDN'T I WARN YOU FROM THE START?!
HAH HAH HAH!
AND I ANSWERED! ENTER THE TIGER'S LAIR TO CATCH THE TIGER'S CUB!
DON'T YOU UNDERSTAND THE CUB IS IN MY HANDS?!
BKAMMM

WHKOOM!

WHOOOM
BHROOM

GOOD GOD!!
FWHOOSH

NOOO! PUT IT OUT!!
PUT OUT THE FLAMES!!
EXTINGUISH THEM! NOW!!
MY...MY TREES ARE BURNING...! M-MY TREES...!
LONE WOLF AND CUB BOOK THREE: THE END TO BE CONTINUED